

What Will They Learn?

Teachers ask their students what they have learned all the time throughout the year. Have you ever asked them what they want others to learn from them? In this challenge, you will ask your students to reflect on what they want to teach their classmates throughout the year.

What you will need:

Time estimate: Three 15 minute blocks of time, plus optional additional time

Materials: paper, pen, method to share student responses with the class

Directions:

1. Ask your class to answer the following prompt: "What would you like the other students in the class to have learned from you by the end of this year?"
2. Collect and review their responses. Reflect - what did you learn about each student from what they've written? How can you use this information to build a stronger relationship with your students?
3. Choose some of the students' responses to share with the class. Make sure to keep them anonymous. Ask the class what they notice about their classmates' responses.
 - o optional: Have students do some goal setting. What do they need to do so that they can achieve what they've written?
4. Later in the year (half way, at the end, when you need some class relationship building, etc), ask students to respond to one of the following prompts.
 - o "Choose any THREE students in this class. What have you learned from them this year?"
 - o "Look back on what you wanted classmates to learn from you. Has that happened? What can you do to make it happen before the end of the year?"

Resources

- Read Cosby's story of completing this activity with his class.

Cosby's Story

I teach a class to high school students from across Washington, D.C. As part of their first semester exam, they answer the question "Choose any three classmates and explain what you have learned about them this semester." Two students interpreted the prompt differently, answering what they learned *from* their classmates.

"Angela is a very honest and kind-hearted person who taught me to over-achieve in life. Her attitude and responses give me life and hope that one day I can achieve anything. She is warm, welcoming and shows everyone that her race doesn't determine who she is as a person. I learned that being different is ok, and she showed me [that] friends come in all shapes and sizes."

"From Erin this semester I have learned the value of knowledge. She is bright and gives [a] different perspective on anything posed. She has taught me that knowledge is great, how you use it is important [and] that one may know something, but that [knowledge] doesn't define you. She has also taught me to try new things and not fear [doing so]."

I decided to share this "mistake" with the class and told them what a wonderful misinterpretation of the prompt I think it is. Then I had them respond to the following: "What would you like the other students in the class to have learned from you by the end of this year?" Here are some of their responses.

"I would want people to learn to always ask dumb questions and speak your mind. I would want people to learn this from me because I'm (clearly) not embarrassed to shout out if I don't know something or realize something." -- Jane

"By the end of the semester, I would like someone to know the importance of diligence and having a good work ethic because these values are important to me. I also like to think I'm the kind of person who always wants to know more about everything and why things work and all of that stuff..."-- Emily

"I would like someone in this class to have learned that it's ok to try and be intelligent and motivated and to continue pushing yourself academically. I also hope that they learn that doing well or trying to do well in school doesn't make a person one-dimensional and they can still be social." -- Angela

"I would like someone in this class to have learned from me that it's ok to be stressed and to not let it hinder your life. I also hope that people learn from me that it's ok to laugh at yourself and that humor is important." -- Juan

This was a reminder to me that the classroom is a place where we learn about each other and about history, and most importantly where we can learn from each other. This "mistake" has turned into a regular part of my curriculum.