

CLOSE UP CONVERSATION SERIES #1

BUILDING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES



CLOSE UP
WASHINGTON DC

mismatch

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction to the Close Up Conversation Series	3
In-Class Activity: Preparing for Conversation #1.....	4
Attachment 1 - Community Inventory.....	5
In-Class Activity: Preparing for Conversation #2.....	6
Attachment 1 A	7
Attachment 1 B	8
In-Class Activity: Preparing for Conversation #3 (Option 1)	9
Attachment 1 - State Outline Example	10
In-Class Activity: Preparing for Conversation #3 (Option 2)	11
Handout 1	13
Reflection	14



Welcome to the Close Up Conversation Series!

The Close Up Conversation Series is designed to help students engage in respectful civil discourse that fosters students' understanding of diverse perspectives and multiple viewpoints. By participating in this series, students will build cultural awareness and empathy through a combination of classroom work and live exchanges with diverse peers.

The series is comprised of three scheduled conversations that will take place live on the Mismatch platform between paired classrooms. The expected timeline for these three conversations is between 2-4 months.

What do the conversations look like?

#1: Building Relationships – The first conversation establishes rapport, builds trust, and helps students learn how to relate to one another. Students will explore questions around relationships, respecting differences, and resolving problems.

#2: Comparing Cultures & Communities – The second conversation asks students to reflect on how their community and cultural heritage influences their opinions. Paired students will take a critical lens to the role that their culture, community groups, and local institutions play in shaping their perspectives.

#3: Exploring American Identity – In this final conversation, students will focus on the role that broader American culture and values play in shaping students' perspectives. As students discuss what it means to be American, they will consider how national leaders, media, and technology have an impact on the collective American identity.

How can I prepare my students for each conversation?

To help educators create a more meaningful experience for their students, this packet also provides teachers with recommended in-class activities to be completed before a live conversation.¹ These activities are intended to help students become familiar with the topics and terminology used throughout the conversation series.

Educators can also take advantage of the following curricular materials found on Close Up's website, which can be used before, during, and after a conversation:

1. [Current Issues Blog](#): Our weekly posts frame major issues in the news and provide critical questions to spark civil discussion in the classroom. The information and questions explored in this blog can provide a ready in-class means for students to practice the discourse skills they develop through the conversation series.
2. [Classroom Resources](#): Close Up's resources help students and teachers investigate current events, research pressing issues using reliable sources, and provide students with the critical thinking and communication skills they need for deliberation.

¹ These activities can be completed immediately before, or a week prior to, the live conversations, depending on their availability.



Preparing for Conversation #1: Building Relationships

Central Question: How would you describe your hometown and community to a visitor?

Goal: Students will develop an inventory of their community to assist them in their first conversation with their conversation partners.

Overview: By examining the characteristics and organizations of their community, students will be equipped to share their personal views and understandings with their conversation partners. You should encourage students to think of the demographics of those who live in their community as well as the cultures, businesses, residences, and institutions that comprise the community.

Time: 30 Minutes

PROCEDURE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

1. Explain to students that in their first conversation, they will be describing their community to their conversation partners in order to teach and learn about each other's hometowns. To prepare, they will be creating a "community inventory" in order to consider the profile of their communities.

Main Learning Activity (20 Minutes)

2. Place students in five groups and assign each group a category:
 - a. Education;
 - b. Businesses and Jobs;
 - c. Housing and Recreation;
 - d. Parks, Green Space & Nature;
 - e. People
3. Give each group the appropriate set of questions (Attachment 1) and a large blank sheet of paper to record their responses and ideas.
4. After the inventories are completed, post the lists around the room and have students walk around to see and to add to the lists created by other groups.

Reflection (5 Minutes)

5. Bring students back together in a whole group. Pose a few of the following questions to discuss:
 - a. Why is it important to consider the positive characteristics of your community?
 - b. Was it difficult to agree on positive characteristics/needs in your small group? Why?
 - c. Was there unanimous consensus about anything added to your inventory?
 - d. What are the benefits of interacting with people from different communities?



Education

- Where do people go to school in your community? Are there multiple kinds of schools (public/private/religious)?
- How many schools are there?
- What clubs and extracurricular activities are available in your schools?
- Are there community colleges, universities, or technical schools for people to attend after high school?

Businesses & Jobs

- What kinds of jobs do people in your community do?
- Do most people work in your community or commute to another town/city?
- What kinds of businesses (shops/stores/services) are in your community?

Housing & Recreation

- What kinds of homes do people in your community live in?
- Do people live close together, or are they spread out?
- What do people in your community do for fun? To relax?

Outdoor Life

- How does nature/the natural world show up in your community? (A lot of trees and green space? Wild animals?)
- Are there parks, playgrounds or other community outdoor spaces in your community?
- Do people in your community spend a lot of time outdoors? What activities do they engage in?

People

- How many people live in your community? Is it rural? A small town? A big city?
- What different cultures, religions, and ethnicities are present in your community?
- Would you consider your community very diverse or more homogeneous? What evidence do you have to support your answer?



Preparing for Conversation #2: Comparing Cultures & Communities

Goal: Students will develop an understanding of their identity, cultural heritage, and its intersectionality with their community.

Overview: To prepare for the second conversation, students will individually brainstorm about how where they are from affects who they are and who they become. They will do this through reading and then writing a *Where I'm From* poem, students will be equipped to share their identities, cultural heritage, and community with their conversation partners. This encourages students to think about how their community and where they are from has impacted their ideas about themselves.

Time: 30 Minutes

PROCEDURE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

1. Explain to students that in their next Mismatch conversation, students will be tasked with describing their cultural heritage with their partners from a different school. In preparation for their second conversation, they will be creating a *Where I'm From* poem to help discover more about themselves.
2. Explain that the *Where I'm From* poem is a creative way to discover how the experiences of living where you live—the sights, the sounds, and the smells of your home and community—shape who you are.

Main Learning Activity (20 Minutes)

3. Read the poem *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon aloud to the students. (Attachment 1A)
4. Ask students to turn to a classmate and discuss:
 - a. What images and ideas from that poem stood out to you?
 - b. What else did you notice about the poem?
 - c. Did you get a picture what kind of place the poet might be talking about?
5. Distribute Attachments 1A & 1B with the text of the poem on the front and a guide to help students write their own poem on the back.
6. Give students 10-12 minutes to work on a *Where I'm From* poem of their own.

Reflection (10 Minutes)

7. If there is time, ask if a few students would be willing to share their *Where I'm From* poems. If not, have students reflect on the process of writing this poem with the following two questions:
 - a. How did you feel in the process of breaking down and understanding your cultural heritage? Was it simple or complicated? Why?
 - b. Why is it important to understand who “you” are (your cultural heritage) when talking to people who you don’t know? What does it bring to the conversation?
8. Consider inviting students to upload their poems to the “I am From” Project, a website and organization that connects people through poetry and art. (<https://iamfromproject.com/about/>)



Where I'm From

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.
I am from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down. I'm from He restoreth my soul
with cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch, fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures.
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments --
snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.



Writing Your Own *Where I'm From* Poem

Directions: Think about specific things that make where you are from—your home, your family, your school, and your community—special. Think about the things you see, hear, smell, taste and feel when you are in those places and with your friends and family. Record your ideas and observations in the table below.

<p>Things I See/Saw</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 	<p>Things I Hear/Heard</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<p>Things I Smell/Smelled</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 	<p>Things I Taste/Tasted</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<p>Things I Feel/Felt</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 	<p>Important Memories</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Now, use your ideas and observations to write a poem following the model on another sheet of paper.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION #3 (OPTION 1)



Preparing for Conversation #3: Exploring American Identity (Option 1)

Central Question: What does it mean to “be American”?

Goal: Students will analyze the factors and influences that shape their perspective on American identity.

Overview: To prepare for the third conversation, students will brainstorm words, phrases, and values that come to mind when they think of their state as well as the country. By reflecting on their state and their place in the nation, students will gain clarity on how their state may align or not align with their understanding of American cultural identity.

Time: 30-35 Minutes

Materials: Outline of your state; post-it notes; projection of U.S.A. map (<https://vemaps.com/uploads/img/large/us-02.jpg>)

PROCEDURE

Introduction (2 Minutes)

1. Review with students that in their second conversation, they discussed their own communities and cultural heritage with their partners. Now, they will begin discussing how their communities and cultural heritage fit in to the larger picture of the United States and American identity.

Main Learning Activity (25-30 Minutes)

2. Place students in small groups of 4-5 and hand out a blank outline of your state to each group (see Attachment 1 for an example). Together they should brainstorm possible responses to the following questions on the back of the outline:
 - a. What words, phrases, or ideas to come to mind when you think about our city and state?
 - b. What words or phrases best describe the opinions and culture(s) of our city and state?
3. Once students have their best answers for the questions above, they should write their one-word or short sentence answers within the outline of their state.
4. Take a few responses from the whole group and compare/contrast student answers.
5. Tell students that we will move from understanding and defining our state to brainstorming about what we think the United States is, what it represents, and what it means to be an American. Staying in the same small groups, hand out post it notes.
6. Each group should record **3-5** one-word or short sentence answers to the following questions on post its:
 - a. What words come to mind when you think about the United States of America?
 - b. In a few words, how would you define “American” identity and culture?
7. During the student discussion, bring up a flip chart or whiteboard outline of the country and indicate where your state is. (example map: <https://vemaps.com/uploads/img/large/us-02.jpg>)
8. Gather students back together as a whole group and have them share out their responses. As students share, they should post their response on the US outline. Group together post-its that share similar words, phrases, or values and highlight common themes.

Reflection / Wrap-up (2 Minutes)

9. Tell students that in their final conversation, they will consider how their community, culture, and identity impact their understanding of what it means to be an American and the values of the United States of America.



IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION #3 (OPTION 2)



Preparing for Conversation #3: Exploring American Identity (Option 2)

Central Question: What does it mean to be an American?

Goal: Students will reflect on important questions related to unity and diversity in the United States and will share ideas about American identity.

Overview: Students react to a series of quotes in whole class and small group discussions to consider different perspectives on what it means to be an American.

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Handout 1

PROCEDURE

Introduction (8 minutes):

1. Post the following quote from civic educator Eric Liu and engage a close reading with the class:
 - “The...challenge, for Americans new and old, is to make a common culture that’s greater than the sum of our increasingly diverse parts. It’s not enough for the United States to be a neutral zone where a million little niches of identity might flourish; in order to make our diversity a true asset, we need those niches to be able to share a vocabulary. We need to be able to have a broad base of common knowledge so that our diversity can be most fully activated.”
2. Conduct a series of think-pair-shares:
 - What does Liu mean that Americans need to make a “common culture”?
 - What are “niches of identity”?
 - Do you believe that Americans share a “common vocabulary”? Why or why not?
 - Do you agree with the author that Americans need to make a “common culture”? Why or why not?

Main Learning Activity (15 minutes):

3. Place students in groups of 4-5.
4. Give each group Handout 1 with a list of terms often associated with the United States. Ask students to discuss each term’s meaning and to select three that they believe are most representative of American culture.
5. As groups finish their discussions, ask one representative from each group to write the three terms their group selected on the board.
6. Choose a few of the most agreed upon terms and hold a short discussion about each, using questions such as:
 - What does this term say about what it means to be an American?
 - Why might someone disagree that this term is an important description of American identity.

Reflection (7 minutes + exit ticket/journaling time):

7. Share the following quote from a historian named Gordon Wood:
 - Precisely because we are not a people held together by blood, no one knows who an American is except by what they believe.
8. Ask students to turn to a partner and ask them to discuss this quote using the following questions as a guide:
 - Do you agree or disagree with this quote?
 - Are there beliefs and ideas that are un-American?
 - Are there beliefs that all Americans must agree on?
9. Exit ticket or journaling prompt: Why is it important to discuss our values with others who may disagree? What do we learn from these encounters?



What does it mean to be American?

Directions: Review the list of terms below and briefly discuss what each means to you. Then, select three of the terms and explain why they capture what it means to be an American to you. If you cannot agree on three, are there other terms that you would add instead?

List of Terms		
Work ethic	Nation of Immigrants	Land of Opportunity
Welcoming	Faith	Independence
Equality	Patriotism	Idealistic

List the three terms that you selected (or the new terms you added) below:



Central Question: How, if at all, has your perspective changed as a result of your Close Up Conversation Series?

Goal: Students will reflect on their experiences and analyze the impact that civil dialogue can have on their views and values.

Overview: To reflect on the final conversation, students will recall the community and cultural characteristics of their conversation partners. Students will then consider how those characteristics intersect with their own idea of an American identity.

NOTE: If you chose to complete the preceding activity, consider the optional step of posting your classroom's state and country map for reference.

Time: 30 Minutes

PROCEDURE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

1. Explain to students that we will reflect on the entire Close Up Conversation Series. Remind students that in their final conversation, they discussed American culture, values that Americans, and the United States may agree or disagree on, and how the media, news, music, etc. may impact or influence their own opinions.
2. Give a few minutes to share out what they enjoyed and/or gained from their conversation.

Main Learning Activity (15 Minutes)

1. After a few minutes, place students in small groups of 4-5. Ask students to recall how similar or different their communities and cultures were from their conversation partners. Following a short discussion, instruct students to write down the words/phrases their partners used to describe their own cultures and community.
2. During the student discussion, bring up a flip chart or whiteboard outline of their conversation partner state.
3. Bring students back to whole group and have each group share out 3-5 words/phrases they discussed. Record any reoccurring words, phrases and themes in the blank partner state outline.
4. Have students return to their small groups and revisit the following questions they discussed with their conversation partners:
 - a. How would you describe an "American" culture?
 - b. Are there any values that you think Americans agree on? If yes, what are those values? If not, what values do you think Americans disagreed on?
5. Based on the answers to those questions, have small groups brainstorm the words they would use to describe the United States (even if they are already on the state flip chart, whiteboard, etc.)
6. During the student discussion, bring up a flip chart or whiteboard outline of United States.
7. Repeat **step 3**, bolding/underlining words that students had said in the previous conversation and repeated this time around.

Reflection (10 Minutes)

1. Have students reflect on a few of the following questions:
 - a. How is your community and your partners' community similar? How are they different?
 - b. What are some reasons why they would be similar and/or different?
 - c. How has this activity deepened your understanding about what it means to be an "American"?
 - d. Thinking back to all three of the conversations you had with your conversation partners, was it important or useful for you to discuss your beliefs, opinions, and identities with people who are different than you?
 - i. If yes, why?
 - ii. If not, how could it become more important or useful?
2. Thank them for their time and engagement with their conversation partners and these conversations throughout the last few weeks.