

5 Arts-Based Strategies for Building Empathy + Inclusion

For K-12 Teachers | Use these quick, creative activities to foster empathy and belonging in your classroom... *no matter what subject you teach.*

Role Card Buddies

TH

Purpose: Build social interaction, turn-taking, and peer connection

Use It: Assign simple role cards (e.g., greeter, encourager, helper) during group activities. Switch roles and reflect together.

Why It Helps: Provides structure and safety for students with autism or social communication needs while helping peers engage intentionally.

"I Am" Identity Boards

VA

Purpose: Promote self-awareness and celebrate strengths

Use It: Students create visual boards that highlight their skills, interests, and preferences using images, words, or tactile materials.

Why It Helps: Supports students with various disabilities in building agency, voice, and peer understanding.

Texture & Tempo

MU

Purpose: Support sensory regulation and expressive communication

How to use it: Students use scarves, bumpy balls, or soft fabrics to match music moods or act out stories.

Why It Helps: Engages students with sensory needs or limited verbal expression through multi-sensory, low-pressure participation.

Visual Prompt Panels

FREE CHOICE

Purpose: Increase task clarity and reduce overwhelm

How to use it: Display 3-5 visual steps or choices using icons or photos (e.g., "Pick a tool → Try it → Share").

Why It Works: Supports students with processing delays, attention challenges, or AAC use by providing predictability and reducing cognitive load.

Sensory Story Walk

TH

Purpose: Reinforce comprehension through movement and touch

How to use it: Create simple stations tied to story elements (e.g., stomp like a giant). Add tactile props and visuals.

Inclusive Tip: Engages students with cognitive or sensory disabilities using embodied learning that supports memory and understanding.

Improv Prompts

TH

Purpose: Support emotional expression and flexible thinking

How to use it: Provide picture or sentence prompts (e.g., "You're excited on the first day!"). Model first, then guide student responses.

Inclusive Tip: Builds confidence and self-awareness for students with anxiety or executive functioning challenges.