Silent Listening With a Partner

Summary
This activity challenges students to practice listening to understand – not simply to respond. It also gives students the chance to share without fear of being interrupted. It isolates the practice of listening to understand and speaking to be understood.

Outcomes
Students will:
- Share personally with a partner, and learn something new about their partner
- Practice listening to understand and not to respond

Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Who?</th>
<th>Any age, any experience level with constructive dialogue</th>
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<tr>
<td>How Long?</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies Needed</td>
<td>None</td>
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Suggested Language for Instructor Framing
“Listening is foundational to productive and meaningful dialogue experiences. Like anything else, deep listening requires practice.”

Detailed Agenda

1 Set the Stage
Tell students that they will be split into pairs. When they are grouped, here are their instructions:

- Establish who is “Person 1” and who is “Person 2.”
- Person 1: Share your answer to the prompt for 2 minutes.
- Person 2: Just listen – do not respond, add anything, or ask questions. You can nod or react silently if you like, but it is important that you stay silent.
- After the 2 minutes are up, Person 2 asks follow-up questions of curiosity to Person 1.

**Examples of Follow-Up Questions of Curiosity**

- What makes you say that?
- Why is that important to you?
- How do you know?
- Can you say more about what you mean when you say ________?
- Why do you think that is?
- Have you always felt that way?
- Say more about that.

- Then, the pairs switch, and it is Person 2’s turn to just speak and Person 1’s turn to just listen.

**Introduce the Speaking Prompt**

There are many prompts that could work well in this activity. Here are a list of options to choose from, depending on the group’s age, level of familiarity with dialogue, and the classroom topic at hand.

**Prompt Options for Silent Listening With a Partner**

- Share about a value, issue, or belief that is important to you. How did you come to feel so strongly about it? Where did you learn it? Has it ever been challenged or questioned? What happened?
- Share about a time you changed your mind or thinking about something. What happened to change it? What was that like?
● Share about a time you overcame a challenge in your life. What was the challenge, and how did you overcome it? What did you learn from that experience?

3 Think Silently Before Starting
After offering the prompt, allow students 1-2 minutes to think about how they might respond. They can do this through writing or thinking silently to themselves.

Remind students that they don’t need to have a polished full response in order to start – sometimes this activity allows for a stream of consciousness to fill the 2 minutes, and that is okay, too.

Wrap-up
Debrief Questions
Ask students to share their reflections in the full group or in smaller groups.

● What did it feel like to just speak?
● What did it feel like to just listen?
● How did you know you were being listened to?
● What does this tell you about listening?
● What does this tell you about sharing?
● Did anything surprise you?
● Did the allotted time feel short or long?