



Flexible Thinking

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm

What does the phrase “think outside the box” mean to you?

Discuss

As student volunteers share their responses, clarify or confirm responses, including: Being able to think of alternative solutions for a problem, thinking differently from everyone else, adaptive thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, or being innovative. Continue to facilitate the class discussion as long as it remains productive and on topic, such as by asking for examples of when students have used thinking outside of the box to solve a problem.

Dive in!

As high school students, you'll learn a lot of information to help you become successful in life. But there are also a number of skills you'll need to be successful as well. Today we're going to talk about one of those skills: Flexible thinking. **Flexible thinking** is sometimes also called divergent or elastic thinking and it includes the ability to think and adapt or adjust to new situations easily. It also means being able to use logic, reasoning, and imagination to come up with new ideas in new situations. One way to practice flexible thinking is by thinking outside the box. When you think outside the box, you look at something with a unique or different perspective. This kind of thinking can help you come up with unconventional solutions to conventional problems. Let's consider an example. NBA player LeBron James was looking for a way to make a difference in the community of Akron, Ohio, where he grew up. Instead of just donating money, the LeBron James Family Foundation partnered with the public school system to open the IPromise Academy in 2018. This school is unlike any other public school in the US. The school day is extended and so is the school year. Students wear uniforms. Students and parents have access to food, housing, haircuts, bikes, clothing, tutors, and medical and dental services. Students who graduate from high school get free tuition at the University of Akron. There's a Family Resource Center that offers parents help to get a high school diploma, legal advice, job coaching, and other resources. In return, parents are required to participate in school activities. This out of the box thinking is showing results. In 2019, the district said that students' test scores increased at a higher rate than 99 out of 100 schools nationally, and 90%



High School

of students met or exceeded individual growth goals in reading and math. These were students that a year earlier had been identified by the district as in danger of failing or dropping out. Today, LeBron James calls the IPromise Academy his biggest accomplishment.

Activity

Distribute copies of the worksheet to students. Have students work in pairs or small groups to identify a problem in the school or community that needs to be solved. Then, have them think outside the box to come up with a possible solution. Next, have students outline steps to achieve the solution. When students have completed the activity, call on groups to share their ideas. Have students keep their worksheets for the next lesson.

Reflect

Have students respond to the prompt at the bottom of the worksheet. Is your solution an example of thinking outside the box? If not, what other ideas can you generate?

Extend and Enrich

Project based learning (PBL) activities often give students the opportunity to practice flexible thinking skills. The Bucks Institute for Education has free lesson plan ideas teachers can use to integrate PBL into their classroom. To find activities, visit: www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl.

For Further Study

- USA Today, *LeBron James: Opening school is my most important professional accomplishment*:
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/2017/11/30/lebron-james-opening-school-most-important-professional-accomplishment/909374001/>
- NY Times, *Lebron James Opened a School That Was Considered an Experiment. It's Showing Promise*:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/education/lebron-james-school-ohio.html>
- Scientific American, *The Power of Flexible Thinking*:
www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-power-of-flexible-thinking/

Professional Development

Are there ways you can integrate more flexible thinking activities into your classroom?