

Reflection Activity Ideas

15–60 Second Activities:

Posed question: Reflection does not require a product or a discussion. Gather the group, obtain silence, and ask a question Give a few more seconds of still silence.

Posed sensation: Same as above, but ask participants to check in with some sensory stimuli (sound, smell, sight) and make a mental bookmark of the project with that observation.

Capturing: Each participant makes a face, a sound, or movement capturing how they felt about the project.

Snapshot: Create a silent snapshot of the project. One person starts with a pose or action related to the project, everybody else joins the “snapshot.”

1 to 5 Minute Activities:

Question discussion: Randomly, or in a circle, each person responds to a posed question (such as “project highlight”)

One to Three words: Each person shares one to three words to describe the activity or how you feel about the activity or anything else regarding the topic.

Journaling: Each person responds to a question in writing

Poetry/Writing Slam: Take turns; each day somebody else will write a short poem or sentence about the project, then share it with the group.

Sculptor: One participant chooses a topic and asks for a set amount of participants to be the clay. The clay people let the sculptor mold them into the sculptor's vision of their topic i.e. invasive plant removal or the plight of someone who is homeless or racism.

5 to 30 Minute Activities:

What? So What? Now What?: To get to each step in the model, allow 5 to 30 minutes for group processing.

Written Reflection: Pose three or four questions, using “what, so what, now what” model, and allow time for writing. (i.e. What you did, why/how you did it, how you could do it better)

The Image: Prior to the project, each person writes or draws about the people or objects they will be working with, the subject matter, or their feelings about the project. Revisit (or re-write/draw) it after the project and discuss.

Senses: Before activity, project, event ask participants to share what they expect to hear, smell, see, touch and taste. Follow up after the day with what the participant actually senses.

Pictionary: Have a pictionary game about the experience and how you felt. Talk about it as a group.

Parables/Stories: Read a piece of pertinent literature and have participants respond and draw correlations to service experience.

Letter to self: Prior to a project, have participants write a letter to themselves about their personal and career goals regarding the project, or feelings about the project or community. Place it in a sealed envelope, mail it to yourself or hand out again to the team after six months and reflect.

Masks: Make a two-sided mask from a paper plate. Draw an image of how others might see you on one side, and how you see yourself on the other. Discuss the contrast. Or, could be work self/free time self, actual work/dream work.

Gingerbread Models: Draw a large gingerbread person at the beginning of the day, with drawings/writings of what makes a good (mentor, team member, etc.). At the end of the day, share what you did well, how you thought you could improve.

5 to 30 Minute Activities (cont.)

Yarn Web: Stand in a circle with a ball of yarn. Each person throws it to another and says one word that explains what they will bring to the next project, something they appreciated in the person they are throwing it to, what they learned, etc. The yarn forms a web supported by the group. Use a thicker string, lower it, and have someone climb on, and try to support a person! (use caution with this one).

Cartoon: Draw a cartoon that teaches something important regarding the project.

All on the Wall: Put a large piece of paper up on one wall or all the way around the room. Participants write or draw feelings/thoughts/learnings on the paper. Facilitator leads discussion based on writings.

Recommendations: Compose a letter offering suggestions for working the future.

Lifeline Biography: Draw a line representing and plot significant periods/events (with writing or drawings) influencing who you are. Share with a partner or small group. This can be adapted many ways: do the same except using a river as a metaphor (where were there rapids, meandering, etc.) or do a Service Biography line (when first service experience, what influenced you, positive and negative impacts on your life)

Object share: Each person brings in and passes around an object, and shares how the object is like them or the project they just did (pick a specific one) examples include: “what I contributed to the team, how I felt about this project, what I learned, etc.” The object can be something found in nature, a type of food, a book, etc. (pick one!)

How did it taste: Bring a mixture of fruits and nuts, have them use these items as metaphors to describe their day, week, project, group interaction, etc, and answer the question, “how did it taste.” The, “what would you like it to taste like?”

30 Minute to Two-hour Activities:

Song, Poem, Collage, Sculpture, Written Story, Skit: Create something artistic as a large group, or individually then meshed together, to express what happened, how it felt, or what the project experience meant to you. It can incorporate what was learned, accomplished, challenges overcome along the way. Could be presented to people from organizations that helped, parents, community volunteers, etc.

Interview each other: Break the group into pairs or triplets and have them interview each other about their experience, take notes, and summarize a couple of things to the group.

Teach: Teach others what you learned through the experience. Put together instructions or references for learning more about it.

Imitations: Each team member picks the name of another team member out of a hat, and imitates that person relating two or three positive traits/contributions to the team, and one quirky habit (something light – judgment is essential)

Inventory: Develop an inventory for the community being served or your own community, regarding the problem you are addressing or work you are doing. What are the resources, who are the local leaders, what roles to certain organizations play, what relationships exist, what other work has been done, what are the various attitudes about the project, what are the challenges, where are they, etc.

Media: Build a skill as well as reflect by writing press releases, taking pictures, contacting media, and obtaining some media coverage of the project.

30 Minute to Two-hour Activities (cont)

Poetry: Each participant comes up with a metaphor to represent where they are in life right now. The metaphors are shared in the whole group, writing them on the flip charts. Break into groups of six, each group chooses a metaphor to write about, each person writes (stream of consciousness) for five minutes. Each person chooses two favorite phrases from their writing and weaves them together with the phrases from other participants of their group to compose a twelve-line poem.

Crafts: Make clay masks, make a sculpture out of recycled or natural materials, finger-paint, etc. Virtually any art activity can be adapted to a reflection experience.

Appreciation/Acknowledgement

Appreciation Cards: Each person writes their name on a card, or slip of paper. Then, the cards are passed around the circle, and each person on the team writes (and draws, if desired) something they appreciate about that person. When they come back to the person of origin, have each person take time to read the cards and make comments.

Whisper-walk: The group forms two lines facing each other. One blindfolded or eye-closed person at a time walks down the middle of the two lines. People on either side of the line step in to the middle (if and when moved to), tap the walker on the shoulder, and whispers in their ear something they appreciate about them. People at the end of the line help guide the person back in line, then they take their blindfold off.

Inside Circle: Each team member takes turns sitting in the middle of the circle with their eyes closed (or opposite the group with their back to the group) and remains silent while the rest of the team randomly share things they appreciate about that person. You might even have somebody writing down what was said.

Imitate-Exaggerate: Each person in the team picks from a hat the name of one other person on the team, and imitates their positive qualities with exaggeration, until the other team members guess who that is. This can be done with the entire group at once, around some task or decision, then discussed afterwards.

Longer-term Project or Team Experience Activities:

Scrapbook or Memory Box: Create a scrapbook of your memories with the team or project, including pictures, quotes said, skills learned, challenges overcome, etc.

Letter to Yourself: At the beginning of the year, write a letter to another person or yourself on something like what your expectations or goals are for the year or why you choose to do service. Collect, save and redistribute at the end of the year. Share and discuss.

Team Photo Trading Cards: You can add history, quotes, and service “stats.”

Video: Shoot a video about the project or about the topic related to the project.

Display/Mural: Create a group or project display/mural, which chronicles the project. If utilized, this can be an excellent outreach tool for recruiting new students, or the public awareness of the project.

Newsletter: Pool your service reflections, stories and pictures together to make a newsletter. This can be sent out to members, sponsors, staff, and community volunteers involved in the project.

Journal: A little writing, every day, goes a long, long way.

Report: Write a report on the project. Use photos!

ABC book: Illustrated with one sentence, thought and/or picture for each alphabet letter. Another option is to use the project or organization name instead of alphabet!

Journaling: A Primer

Journaling is one of the best reflection tools. Ideally, the program or project would allow for a few minutes every day/week for students to journal; preferably at the end of the period or during/after a debrief. It is helpful if the teacher provides substantial structure to insure quality, conscientious journaling. Regardless of the time allotted, it is important to encourage students to write whatever comes to mind.

Journaling Methods

Clusters: Have people shout out words or phrases that describe the day. Ask each person to take two minutes to write five or six words in random spaces on their journaling page. Give a short speech about the interconnectedness of everything, the web of life, Quantum Physics, or whatever and ask them to do a free write focusing on those five or six items and how they are related.

The Critical Incident: Choose an incident that involved the entire team and give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask them to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the four “W” questions, “who, what, where, when.” You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from another.

Dialogue: A good one for developing observation and communication skills. Ask participants in the morning to pay special attention to conversations they hear throughout the day. Ask them to pay special attention to mannerisms, accents, and the tone of the conversation. Later, have the participants pick a dialogue and duplicate as closely as possible how it went. This should be done in a light-hearted manner on a light-hearted day to avoid a “bashing” session. This is an exercise that gets better with time, as their observation and retention skills improve.

Different Perspectives: A great one for developing empathy skills. Ask participants to recall a specific occurrence from the day that involved some degree of conflict. Ask them to assume the viewpoint opposite that which they actually held during this conflict (or the viewpoint they were the least empathetic with) and write a description of the conflict from this perspective. This can include what happened, their role in it, what they want, what they envision as the ideal solution. Good debrief questions are, “How did it feel to do this writing, how were you able to get in their shoes or how was it difficult, what is one thing you realized through this writing.”

The Fly on the Wall: Ask participants to take a couple moments to reflect on the day (where they've been, what they've done, whom they've worked with, tools they've used). Then ask them to pretend they were a "fly on the wall" observing but not participating in the scene and write a short descriptive passage based on their observations. You can also use any animal or plant or person that was near the project site.

Guided Imagery: Encourage participants to relax, close their eyes, get comfortable, notice their breathing, etc. and read a guided imagery. Then, ask the participants to free-write about what they experienced.

The Free Write: The easiest and perhaps most effective journaling method, wherein people that think they "can't write" or "have nothing to say" realize how much and how well they can write. For a predetermined amount of time participants engage in continuous writing by keeping their pens moving . . . even if only to write, "I don't know what to write." It is helpful to trigger the free-write with an open-ended sentence such as "I don't think I'll ever forget..." or "If I could do one thing differently, I would..." or make up your own! Let participants know when they are nearing the end of the writing time, then ask them how it went.

The Letter: Have participants write a letter to themselves, a relative, a historical figure, a political figure, etc. describing the project and what it means to them, or ask for some piece of advice, etc.