Beyond Icebreakers

Community Building Routines that keep Adult ESOL Learners Coming Back

Let's mix-pair-share!

When the music plays - MIX

When the music stops- PAIR

I'll give you a question to SHARE.

Share

- 30 seconds
- 1 speaker / 1 listener

The person who got up the latest this morning will start

Question

What's something that made you smile this week?

Let's mix-pair-share, again!

When the music plays - MIX

When the music stops- PAIR

I'll give you a question to SHARE.

Find another pair

When you have 4 members, raise your hands!

Round-Robin

- 30 seconds
- name one item in turns

The person who has been in the ESOL field the longest starts.

Question

What are some things that make people feel like they belong in a group or community?

You have a group!

Say 'I look forward to working with you today'! to your members and find a seat next to each other.



Turn, talk, write

Why did I start my session off this way?

Instructions

Collaborate Board

Turn, talk, write

Community isn't an Icebreaker. It's infrastructure.

What keeps you coming back?

When my students are asked what keeps them coming back in the chaos, one answer comes up again and again:

The COMMUNITY

What community Provides

Community creates...

CONNECTION
Someone knows me.

BELONGING
I am part of this.

RECIPROCITY
People support me—and I support them.

ACCOUNTABILITY
Someone notices when I'm not there.

SUPPORT
When life gets hard, I don't have to navigate it alone.

So how do we build community?

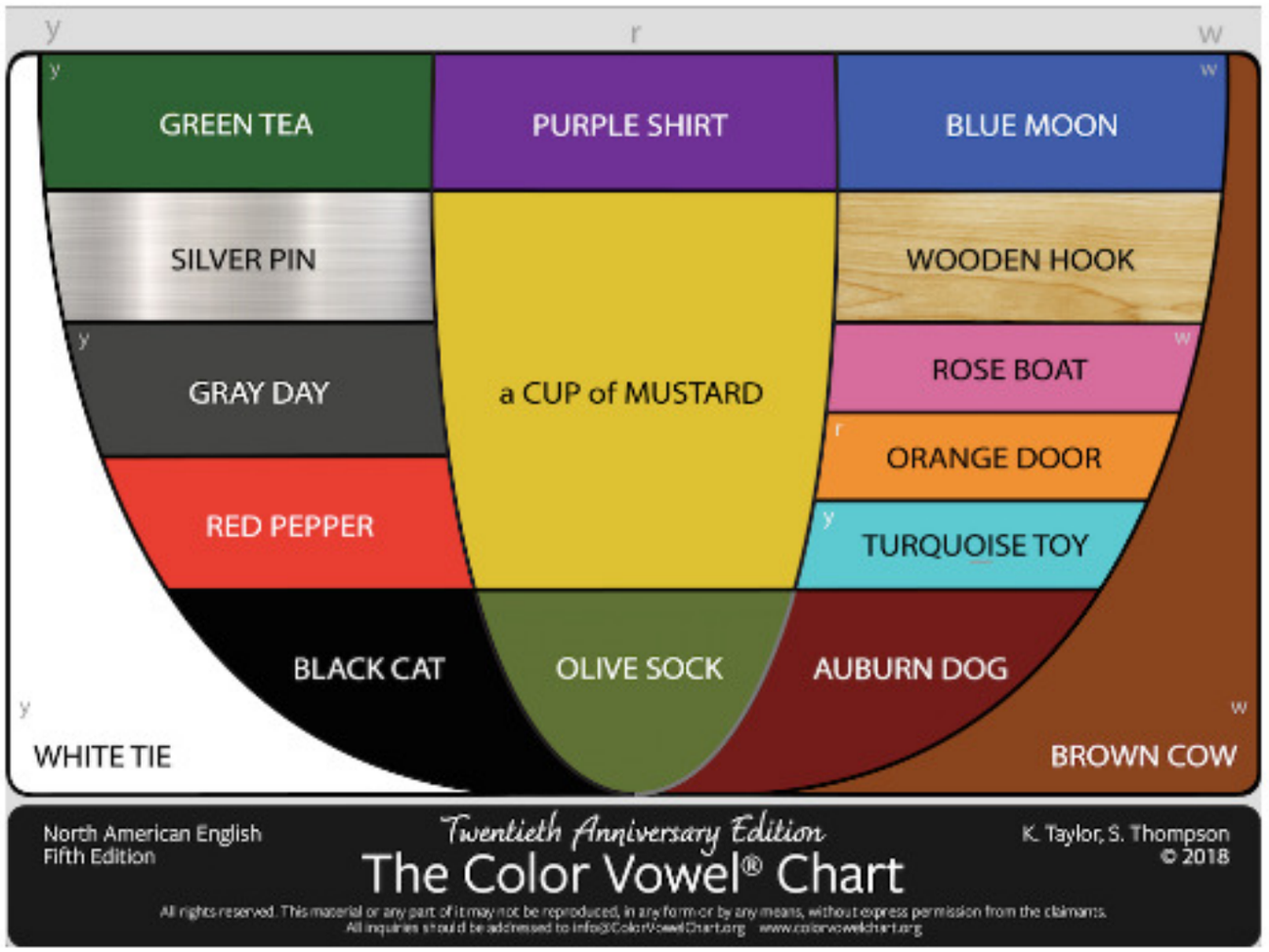
How do we move from a room full of individual students to a learning community?

By the end of this session, you'll have practical ideas for intentionally building community into your everyday teaching—not just on the first day of class.

It starts with a name

How do you make sure every learner feels known from the beginning?

What color is your name?



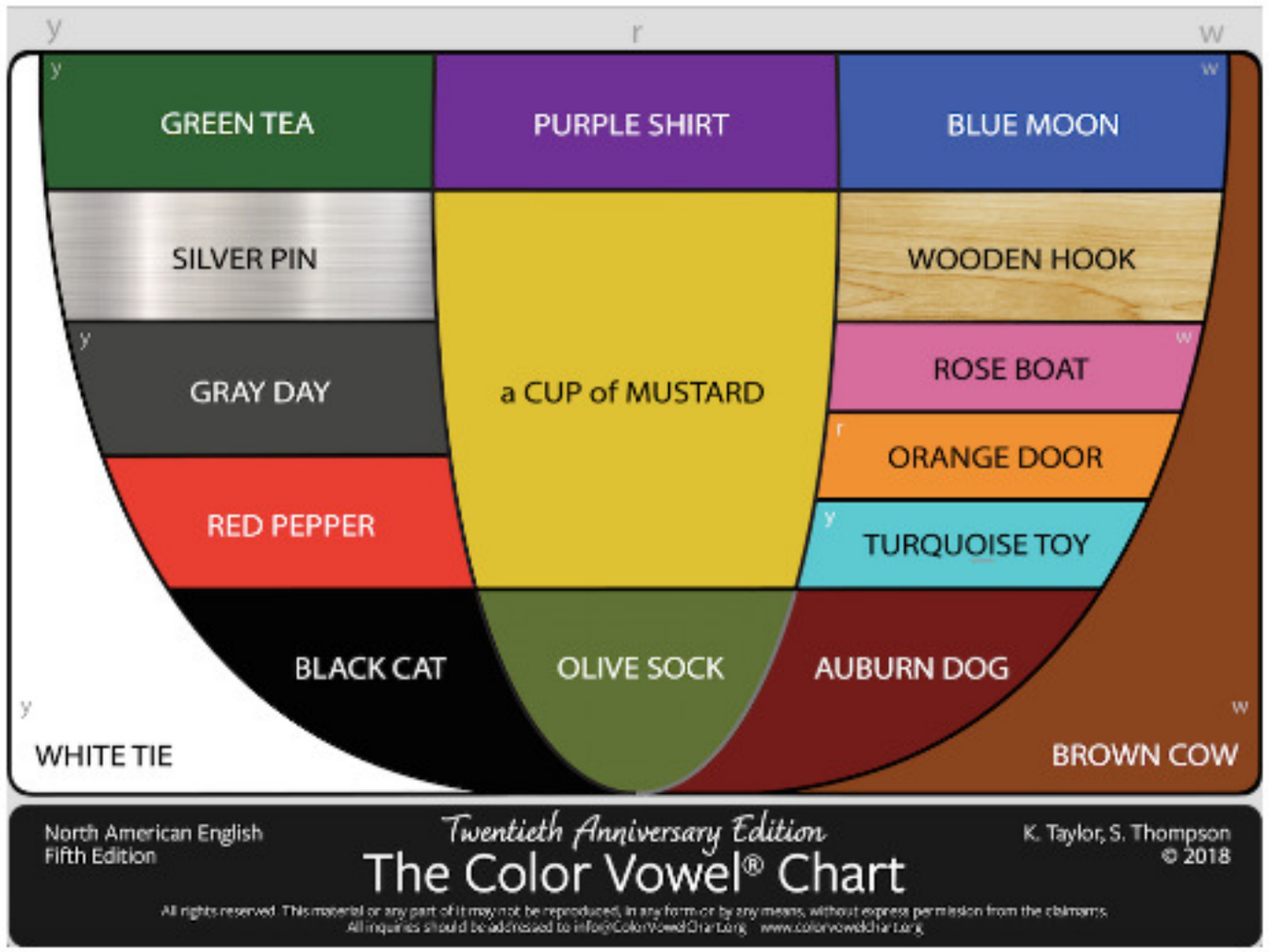
Find your color

1. Say your name naturally.

2. Find the stressed vowel sound.

3. Match that sound to the Color Vowel Chart.

4. Tell the people in your group: “My name is _____, and my name is _____.”



Beyond pronunciation

How could an activity like this help build classroom community?

Your name matters enough for us to learn how to say it

Being known is one of the first steps toward belonging.

Let them show you who they are

Marianna



What is something fun or interesting you did recently, or something new you tried?	I went ziplining in San Pedro la Laguna, Guatemala.
What is a favorite song and singer of yours?	I like A LOT of different music, but here are two of my favorite songs: Tinariwen (+IO:I) - Nànnuflày Simon and Garfunkel - America
What do you want to do in the future? What are your dreams? (**Optional:** You can add a photo or link to something on youtube.)	I want to get my doctorate and run a free ESL program for refugees. When I retire, I want to build an earthship and live near the beach in Oman.

Don't ask if you aren't going to listen

What students share should shape the community you build.

- ☐ Favorite song → Class playlist
- ☐ Photo → Classroom display
- ☐ Interests & experiences → Future conversations and connections

Don't leave connection to chance

Create reasons for students to interact with different people

What structures do you use to get students interacting outside their usual partners or groups?

Build connection into the routine

The goal isn't for students to meet everyone once. It's to keep giving them reasons to interact.

- Mix–Pair–Share: Move, meet, talk, repeat.
- Round Robin: Everyone contributes. Everyone listens.
- Change partners + Groups: Don't always let the same people work together
- Structured Speaking Time: Give everyone space to speak *and* listen

Eventually, it doesn't need you

The strongest classroom communities begin supporting themselves.

"We missed you. Are you okay?"
Classmates notice absences and check in.

"Here's what we did in class."
Students help one another catch up.

"Are you coming tonight?"
Students become another reason to show up.

"I can help you with that."
Support becomes reciprocal.

What is something you already do to make learners feel known, connected, or needed?



Make it intentional

What is ONE community-building practice you want to try, adapt, or be more intentional about after today? It can be something from this session, something another participant shared, or something you already do.

Instructions

Collaborate Board

Make it intentional

Community isn't an icebreaker. It's infrastructure.

- Build it intentionally.
- Build it consistently.
- Give learners another reason to come back.

Thank You

Questions?

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