

Learning for a Sustainable Future's

# Thinking Forward

*Back to School Toolkits for Building  
Classroom Communities in a Pandemic World*



**Grades 6-9**

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Learning for a  
Sustainable Future

**LSF**

# Thinking Forward Toolkit

## Rationale

Teachers will be greeting new groups of students this year after many unique and challenging months of schooling. They will be eager to begin learning together again and to build the skills, knowledge and understanding so beneficial to all students. But there are many important lessons from the past months that we don't want to miss or forget. In spite of severe restrictions, uncertainty and physical and mental challenges, there have been countless examples of adaptability, creativity and transformational actions.

## Purpose and Focus of the Toolkits

These toolkits will provide educators with sessions for reflection and thinking about the Pandemic experience in a thoughtful, proactive and engaging way. They are designed for primary, junior, middle school and high school levels. The material and activities are age appropriate, applicable to diverse learners and can connect to any subject discipline or curriculum.

The focus is on key concepts which will help students to move forward with new awareness, resilience and optimism for the future. While each session connects to students' experiences, the concepts investigated are also linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, allowing students to see how their learning is useful and to act on it.



## Overview

### What is in the toolkit?

There are 4 sessions containing outlines, activities, and resources to explore concepts. Each lesson is designed to be 45 minutes to 1 hour in length:

**Session One:** The introduction to the Thinking Forward process includes creating a safe space and essential agreements for listening and responding with respect and the power of diverse perspectives. Teachers will already be working on core social skills for creating a positive learning culture, so this lesson will be useful beyond the Thinking Forward lessons.

**Session Two:** The session explores the concepts of Adaptability and Creativity. These qualities were critically important skills and so often exhibited throughout the year. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the many ways things changed rapidly in their world to keep them safe and to continue learning, working and staying connected. The role of technology, the importance of nature and green spaces, the adaptations made in business, health and government practices could all be included.

**Session Three:** This session explores the concept of trust in the Scientific Method for Evidence-Based Decisions and Actions. Many have described the last year as living through the “world’s largest science experiment”. What have we learned about seeking trusted sources and having to wait for validated results of tests and data before acting? How can we use this understanding going forward in evaluating information, seeking validated facts, managing our emotions throughout the process and taking responsible action?

**Session Four:** This session explores the concepts of Interconnection, interdependence and citizenship. It looks at the importance of our human connections, our societal systems and our interconnected natural world. How did we try to maintain our connections in the last year? What worked for us? What is our responsibility in helping keep ourselves safe and to help others keep safe. “What do we want to maintain and improve in our systems going forward?”

**“The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don’t yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together.”**

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

- The sessions can take place in any learning space, including in class, online, or outside in nearby nature.
- Several strategies are taken from LSF’s climate change education resource, [Empowering Learners in a Warming World](#) which includes [42 active learning strategies](#).
- In addition, many resources included can be accessed on LSF’s [Resources for Rethinking database](#)
- Also check out this [Emotional Resilience Toolkit for Climate Work](#) and this article, [SDGs- Why it Matters](#)

**Important Note:** Getting to know students at the beginning of the year is a common school practice. For many reasons, it will be important for teachers to have any information that might make this year more challenging or make reflection on the past year especially difficult for an individual student.

**Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF)** is a Canadian charity founded in 1991 to promote, through education, the knowledge, skills, values, perspectives, and practices essential to a sustainable future.

# Session 1 - Key Concepts: The Power of Diversity and Perspective

## Background Information

This lesson is an Introduction to the Thinking Forward process including creating a safe space and essential agreements for listening and responding with respect, while building on ideas with cooperation through engaging activities. Teachers will already be working on core social skills for creating a positive learning culture, so this lesson will be useful beyond the Thinking Forward lessons.

Supplies for thinking can include:

- iPads
- Chart paper and markers/ paper for each student
- White boards or clip boards and pencil crayons.

While each session connects to students' experiences, the concepts investigated are also linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, allowing students to see how their learning and actions support change in the world. Consider posting the [SDG 17 goal poster](#) in your classroom for [easy reference](#).

## Sustainable Goals



[Good Health and Well-being](#)



[Reduced Inequalities](#)

## Provocation

10 - 15 minutes

### Neighbourhood Walk with a Twist!

Take a short walk outside in the schoolyard and look for ONE interesting object, human or more-than-human. Students will speak in role/take on the character of this object, to share the object's perspective on what happened during the pandemic. Stories only need to be about a minute, but could be funny, poignant, angry, sad, or any range of emotions. In small groups of 4 or 5, each actor leads the group to their object (not removing them from nature!) and tells their story.

*This activity could be adapted to indoor or virtual environments by using pictures, bringing objects from home, or using familiar/common objects (ie Walmart sign or a mailbox).*

## Circle Discussion

### Knowledge Building Circle

This protocol is based on the belief that "All ideas are Improvable!" (Scardemalia and Bereiter, 2006 in [Knowledge Building in Inquiry](#)) and that together we can build new knowledge and understanding beyond what we can accomplish alone.

This activity requires all members to sit in a circle, indoors or outside. For virtual classes, encouraging students to be present in the discussion with cameras on and displaying the members of the group in gallery view would be ideal. These arrangements and using the protocols listed below, when clearly understood and practiced, can truly allow students to feel safe, to think deeply, and to connect with their peers. The teacher is a member of the group and may take notes but *is not directing the flow of discussion*.

In a KBC, we demonstrate::

- Respectful Listening
- Asking Questions for the group to answer together (not the teacher)
- Waiting for a turn to talk (some classes use an object to pass to the speaker)
- Paraphrasing what someone has said to clarify the idea
- Accepting diverse ideas and perspectives or suggestions
- Adding on to the comments and ideas of others with connected ideas or examples
- Encouraging everyone to contribute if they wish to.

In a KBC, members explain their ideas and ask questions, such as:

- “ Can you tell me more about your idea?”
- “ Have you considered (another person’s) idea or perspective?”
- “ How do you know that?”
- “ Why do you think that might happen?”
- “ Can we think of an example or evidence for that point?”
- “ Can someone explain that idea a bit more”?
- “ Can I add on to that idea or comment?”
- “ Is there more information we need to help us?”

Having an anchor chart or handout of these protocols and discussion prompts would be helpful as students learn and practice KBC.

Select one or both questions for the KBC:

1. Why is considering diverse perspectives so difficult to practice but so important to our health and wellbeing?
2. What could we do to make people feel their perspectives are more welcome and valued in our class and in our school?

### Activity 1. (25 min)

#### Playing with Perspective- Human Camera Exercise

This game can be played indoors or outside, and is a great way to build trust and connection between students. One student acts as the photographer, and the other student is a “camera”. The photographers search around the schoolyard/park/room to find beautiful or interesting ‘shots’ which could be taken from interesting angles or distances. At the spot where the photographer wants to take the picture, they tap the ‘camera’ on the shoulder (or say 3-2-1 SNAP! to maintain distancing requirements), Photographer takes 3 ‘photos’ (5 mins) and then the partners switch.

After each student takes 3 ‘shots’, using some sketch paper and pencils, they take about 10 minutes to sketch the ONE shot that they took when acting as the camera that they felt was most interesting or impactful. Once finished sketching, the partners discuss and share what they each chose to draw and why it was impactful to them. They compare each other’s thoughts about what was interesting.

*Virtual classes could capture photos for homework, then bring to breakout rooms or an app like FlipGrid to share in groups.*

### Activity 2. (20 min) - Designing a Pandemic Survival Kit

Tell students they will be making a list of 10 items to take into the 22nd lockdown of the 67th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this scenario, they will have to go into lockdown with their family and one other family to form a lockdown bubble. Unfortunately, they have to shelter away from home, potentially for a long while, but food, medicine, beds and clothing have been provided. Their Survival kit is meant to provide them some comfort and satisfaction through the isolation. (5-10 minutes) Out of their list of items, choose the THREE most essential items on the list that improve their well-being. In a small group, share their lists explaining why some items are more important than the others. (10 mins)

*What might you have learned about yourself through this activity? What did you learn about your classmates?  
How might having lived through this pandemic influenced your choices?*

### **Taking Action:** Allowing time for students to take action is an essential part of the learning process

Celebrating and Sharing our Uniqueness...

Individually create self-portraits that highlight the unique interests, talents and skills of each person in the class!

Who are you?

What makes you unique?

What do you care about?

What global goals are most important to you?

Menu of choices:

1. Brainstorm a list of 10-20 words to describe who you are. Plan what colours, symbols, or designs might help communicate more about you to the audience. Start with a face silhouette (instructions [here](#)) and sketch out your portrait. Then paint or colour it! Check out a similar style of artwork using [black and white](#). Use those words to share who you are!
2. Create a mind map of your identity- interests, beliefs/values, family, habits, appearance, hobbies, friends, special possessions, creative activities, choices... then create a MANGA style portrait that is ½ you, and ½ showing aspects of your identity. Idea described in [more detail here](#).
3. Series of Photo Sketches- Gather together 8-12 props (or use sidewalk chalk to draw your props on the sidewalk) that represent different aspects of your identity. Ask a friend to take photos of you with these props from the same position and perspective. Import these series of photos into a photo editing software to create a grid-view collage of these portraits. Play with editing tools, but don't 'decorate' the photos too much! Activity inspired by [this tutorial](#).
4. Poetry and Art - Combine your self-portrait art with an autobiographical poem. Which artist might inspire your self-portrait style? What medium do you have access to? What might be better to express in text vs visually? How do poets create self-portraits with text (Poetry in Voice has some great poems like "[I Am](#)" by Titilope Sonuga that could inspire!)

### Creating Core Community Values Statements (Part 1)

Consolidation - Close the sessions by thanking all the participants and by taking time to write a statement for your class based on what we have learned today about what can need/needed to help us through the pandemic.

### Essential Agreement

In our class we will \_\_\_\_\_

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## Session 2 - Human Adaptability and Creativity Can Solve Complex Problems

### Background Information

This activity explores the concepts of Adaptability and Creativity. These qualities were critically important skills and so often exhibited throughout the last year. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the many ways things changed rapidly in their world to keep them safe and to continue learning, working and staying connected. The role of technology, the importance of nature and green spaces, the adaptations made in business, health and government practices could all be included. This lesson will provide students with examples of resilience and the super human power of adaptability and problem-solving!

### Sustainable Goals



[Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure](#)

### Provocation

Display [4 different examples of creativity and innovation displayed during the pandemic](#) (Roller skate Drive In Restaurants, Vaccine Hunters, food fridges, and hug devices)

Discussion points

1. Which innovation "spoke" most to you and why
2. What need did it address
3. What creative/knowledge tools and skills do you think the creator utilized?



Virtual classes could use virtual whiteboards or slides to record thinking (Jamboard/Google Slides). Clip the images to clipboards and set up in shady spots around your schoolyard for an outdoor or indoor version of [Carousel Brainstorming](#).

## Circle Discussion

[Inside Outside Circle Protocol](#) - Can be done virtually using prompts on Jamboard for online classes or outdoors in a double circle with in-person classes.

- What was one of the most difficult challenges you faced at school last year?
- How do you typically feel or react when you have to face a difficult problem?
- How do you show or express creativity or innovation?
- Is there someone in your family who you see as creative and innovative? How do they show that?
- What was something creative or new that you learned how to do last year? Did you have a pandemic passion project?

Facilitator can ask volunteers to summarize what came up for them during discussions and summarize on chart paper/whiteboard/

### Activity 1. (15-20 min)

How did you and your family display innovation and creativity to solve problems during the pandemic and what need did it address?

Examples might be: surprise zoom call activities for birthdays/celebrations, setting up work stations for multiple siblings to go online for school, how to help older relatives in a safe manner

Share your personal story in a written or artistic form (sketchnote). *Could done outdoors in sit spots*

### [Gallery Walk](#)

Have students display their work around the class (digital options could be add image to a shared Google Slide or Jamboard)

Take time to leave an adjective (on a post-it) on examples that stood out to you as fulfilling a particularly important need or being particularly innovative

## Taking Action: *Allowing time for students to take action is an essential part of the learning process*

What materials or spaces can inspire us to make our classroom a creative and inspiring space?

Ex: Maker space, easels, art table,  
Placemat protocol and/or [sketches/doodling](#)

Facilitator collects and shares ideas in a whole class discussion

## Creating Core Community Values Statements (Part 2)

What values or skills do we need in our class...

**Consolidation** - Close the sessions by thanking all the participants and by taking time to write a statement for your class based on the skills and values we discussed and explored today that we would like to see in our class

## Essential Agreement

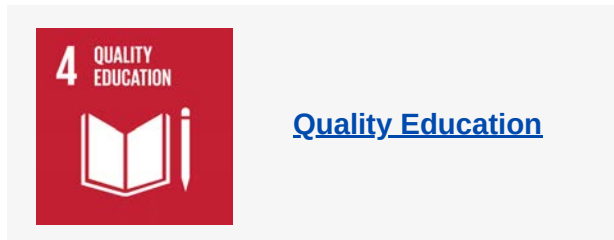
In our class we will \_\_\_\_\_

## Session 3 - Using Facts and Science-based Evidence to Take Action

### Background Information

This activity explores the concept of developing trust in the Scientific Method to make evidence-based decisions and take responsible actions. Many have described the last year as living through the “world’s largest science experiment”. What have we learned about seeking trusted sources and having to wait for validated results of tests and data before acting? How can we use this understanding going forward in evaluating information, seeking validated facts, managing our emotions throughout the process and taking responsible action?

### Sustainable Goals



### Provocation

Mask misinformation parody. Watch the video [Hamilton Mask-up Parody Medley](#).

*Discuss:* What were some important decisions you and your family had to make during the pandemic (examples might be masking, washing down groceries, how many people/who to visit, online vs. in person leaning, in store vs. curbside and delivery, vaccine)

Use think-pair-share protocol

#### Activity 1.

Direct Students to [Project Drawdown](#) and then show [The Drawdown Review](#) to reinforce that the challenges students are about to explore are based on scientific evidence.

Have students explore any three action categories and search for an action project that could help at home, school and in their community. Record on sticky notes for the discussion to follow [Affinity Map protocol](#)

Have students begin individually and as the activity progresses they will connect and meet with people who have similar goals and see if there are school or home based solution that could be quickly/easily implemented

This could be done outdoors for in person classes or virtually using a jamboard and then breakout rooms for online classes

### Circle Discussion

Step Into the Circle protocol. Students stand or sit in a circle (virtual classes could do a thumbs up or type into a chat feature of a VLE). The facilitator reads statements aloud and if students agree they take a step forward

Possible statements could include:

- You should consider the source of your information
- There are usually pros and cons to a position
- If it's on the news, you can believe it
- One source of information is enough
- It can help to make a list of questions or factors when trying to make a decision
- It's OK just to read the headlines or a caption to understand what's happening in a news story
- Experts usually do more than trial or experiment before they draw a conclusion

**Taking Action:** *Allowing time for students to take action is an essential part of the learning process*

Following the Step Into The Circle activity, ask students “What makes for science and evidence based decisions?”

Ex: Proper research, consider source of information

### **30 SECOND SOUNDBITE**

Each group shares their discussion and results with the larger group

*(Virtual classes could work in break out rooms then share with the larger group afterwards)*

### **Creating Core Community Values Statements (Part 3)**

**Consolidation** - Close the sessions by thanking all the participants and by taking time to write an essential agreement around constructive decision making.

### **Essential Agreement**

**In our class we will** \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Session 4 - Interconnectedness and Reciprocity in Systems**

### **Background Information**

This activity explores the concept of Interconnection. It looks at the importance of our human connections, our societal systems and our interconnected natural world. How did we try to maintain our connections in the last year? What worked for us? What is our responsibility in helping keep ourselves safe and to help others keep safe. What do we want to maintain and improve in our systems going forward? What do we need to let go of? How are all the concepts in these lessons interconnected?

### **Sustainable Goals**



[Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions](#)

### **Provocation (10 minutes)**

Watch the video [“The Great Realisation”](#). Consider what was positive, negative (a minus), or just interesting to think about in the story. Share on sticky notes, a white board, or online tool (such as Flipgrid, Google Jamboard).

### [Plus Minus Interesting](#)

### **Circle Discussion (10-20 minutes)**

#### [When I Made A Difference](#)

Have students consider the prompts

“How did I make a difference to people and the planet during the past year of Covid lockdowns?” and

“Describe a time this past year when something important and good happened because of something you said or did...”

Give them 5-10 minutes to think through, plan and/or write the story. Then, in small groups of 3-4, share stories. As students listen to each story, the group members need to try and identify the qualities of that person- the skills, characteristics, abilities they demonstrated. At the end of each story, create a visual display of these words on chalkboard, paper, or digital whiteboard (such as Google Jamboard). Notice that there is a synergy of powerful, positive energy from these actions in their relationships!

*Where and how might that good feeling flow?*



## Activity 1. (30+ minutes)

### What World Do You Want in 2030?

*What would a country look like if all of the UN SDGs were achieved by 2030?*

Divide students into small groups of 3-6. Provide each group with an image showing the global goals, question prompts and resources found in the link above. Students research, discuss and work together to create a diagram or sketchnote of an ideal or “Global Goals Country”. Sketchnoting tips are [here](#).

Once the diagrams are complete, display the ‘maps’ and have groups do a “[Gallery Walk](#)” to view each of the other groups work. Ask groups to think deeply about what they see in these ‘ideal countries’, perhaps by using sticky notes to label what they see or to note what is missing.

*What in the maps of their Global Goals country promotes health and well-being?*

*How will they make sure that they are designing a country where everyone is included?*

*How will they ensure that nature is protected?*

When students return to the large group, debrief what they noticed. Then, ask the group:

*How will we achieve these goals here?*

*What would individuals need to do or change to ensure that this happens?*

*What could our class do to take action for the Global Goals this year?*

## Activity 2.

### Interdependence in our Community Walk

*How have we been caring for each other and our place throughout COVID?*

*What do we need to do better, as a community?*

As your class takes a walk through your neighbourhood, notice examples of how human, built, and more-than-human worlds depend on each other- how our relationships make us stronger together.

Consider:

- *What do we need to let go of...*
- *What lessons have we learned from COVID that have helped us?*
- *How can we be more responsible and kind in our actions?*

Students could take photographs of some poignant examples, record videos or write a journal entry to record what they noticed.

**Taking Action:** *Allowing time for students to take action is an essential part of the learning process*

### Appreciating the Relationships that Sustain Us

Menu of Choices:

1. Write a letter of gratitude to someone who was especially kind and supportive to you during the pandemic but hasn't been thanked. Take the time to add some of your artistic/creative skill to this, or actually read the letter to this person.
2. Create a song or piece of art that shows your gratitude for someone or something that was meaningful to you during the pandemic.
3. Choreograph a simple dance routine that shows gratitude for the planet, for being alive... consider how this dance could be shared/performed.
4. Build/construct a gratitude box using recycled materials. Write statements of gratitude and place them in the box.

*Some things I love about being alive on Earth are... A place that was magical for me as a child was... Someone who helped me believe in myself was... Things I am grateful that I can hear/touch/see are... When I step outside, I am grateful for....*

### Creating Core Community Values Statements (Part 4)

**Consolidation** -Close the sessions by thanking all the participants and by taking time to write a statement for your class based on the skills and values we discussed and explored today that we would like to see in our class

### Essential Agreement

In our class we will \_\_\_\_\_