



JOYFUL

BEGINNINGS

5 Ways to Reframe **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Kids deserve **joyful beginnings**—at any time of year.

Social-emotional learning is often discussed in terms of what it can *do* for students. But as a teacher, SEL is already part of what you and your students do each day. With these simple yet impactful activities, **experts Pam Allyn and Dr. Ernest Morrell** offer five ways to bring the positive power of SEL to the center of the classroom. Each strategy is flexible, fun, easy to implement—and designed to nurture joyful beginnings at any point throughout the year.

Kids have a natural desire to belong in their community, and to use their voice to tell their story. These actions create joy, hope, and, ultimately, opportunities to change their world. That's why, at Zaner-Bloser, we believe that *social-emotional learning is at the heart of a vibrant and joyful learning community.*

In the spirit of that community, we want to hear how you are providing opportunities for each of your students to be included and heard. In this document, you'll find the **Joyful Beginnings Pledge**—a simple template including the five strategies outlined below, with space to add your own—and a note on how to share your pledge with us. By customizing a pledge, your class will craft a shared reminder of your community values.

We invite you to use (and reuse) these five strategies to promote and celebrate the social-emotional growth in your classroom community. We hope you'll join us in creating joyful beginnings—setting the stage for successful learning at any time of year!

1 CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF BELONGING

LIKE THIS

SEL experts Pam Allyn and Dr. Ernest Morrell think of SEL from the lens of *Self–Community–World*. Social-emotional learning starts with understanding oneself and expands to an awareness of others in the community, and eventually, to a child’s role in the larger world. All of this begins with *belonging*. Encouraging students to value the self is the first step in cultivating their sense of belonging. The following activity focuses specifically on building belonging in the classroom as students get to know one another.



Invite students to create **Monthly Self-Portraits**.

- Any medium works: collage, watercolor, pen or pencil, or a digital drawing app of your choice.
- Have students add words or sentences to their self-portrait that represent who they are, such as *dancer, dog lover, pizza eater* (whatever brings them joy!). Younger students can share orally.
- With their self-portrait, have students include their name—as well as something special about it. It’s important for students to pronounce their name and have it recognized by the class community. This seemingly simple act can go a long way in creating a joyful sense of belonging.
- Each month, students can return to their self-portraits with the option of adding to or remaking them. You can also invite students to share their self-portrait with the class, in small groups, or with a partner.

My name is **Seiko**.
My name means “**truth**.”

My name is **Xavier**.
I’m named after my
grandfather.

My name is **Lucía**.
My little brother
calls me **Lulu**.

2 BUILD A COMMUNITY THAT INCLUDES EVERY VOICE

OUR LISTENING MANTRA

To ensure every voice is heard in the classroom community, it's important to create a culture of deep listening. In addition to building community, listening practices help students cultivate a valuable life skill. (After all, listening—not talking—is our most frequent form of communication!) Here are some actions you can weave into the school day to help students become great listeners.

Guide students in co-creating a Listening Mantra.

- Start with a short brainstorm to define deep listening.
- Prompt students to recall a time when someone was a deep listener for them, asking questions such as, *What did this feel like? How did the person look as they listened? What qualities make a great listener?* Older students can do a free write or turn and talk. Younger students can share orally.
- Take notes on what your students share, then work together to craft a Listening Mantra

based on their ideas. Aim to keep it simple and memorable—for example, “Good listeners are present, positive, and pay attention.”

Try a Listening Protocol for older students.

- While one person shares, others in the group can take notes in three areas: *Something I liked*, *Something I learned*, and *Something I want to know more about*.
- After the speaker has finished, listeners can share out what they've noted in each area—or choose one of the three areas to discuss, if time is limited.
- Try the Listening Protocol during any small-group time, or pair it with the presentation of students' Monthly Self-Portraits.

“Good listeners are present, positive, and pay attention.”



3 MAKE SPACES FOR STORYTELLING

LIKE THIS

In the classroom space, kids often *receive* stories—but it’s equally important that they are given opportunities to share them. By sharing their own stories, students not only practice narrative, but also continue to build connection with and empathy toward one another—qualities essential to a thriving classroom community. Try this suggestion to make space for students to share their own stories.

Schedule a weekly **Storytelling Day**.

- Pick a day of the week for some designated storytelling time (such as “Storytelling Fridays”), perhaps during your morning meeting. On that day, set aside 10–15 minutes for storytelling in an “open mic” style.
- Allow this time to include as much choice as possible—kids can sign up in advance to share a story, write it down beforehand, or bring in an artifact to show while they talk.

By making storytelling a regular ritual, you will communicate to students the value of their stories, reinforcing both belonging and community. (Tip: This is another great place to try out the Listening Protocol, too!)



As a prompt, students can share a story of **remembering, imagining, or wondering.**

4

SET THE STAGE FOR WORLD CHANGERS THROUGH GOAL SETTING

As students develop their sense of self and community, they can begin to consider the larger world and their roles within it. This is the final piece in the social-emotional arc of *Self–Community–World* that Pam Allyn and Dr. Ernest Morrell describe. Once students build a sense of belonging, community, and voice through storytelling, they can explore their hopes. With the following activity, you can begin to engage students in exploring how those hopes can move from dreams to reality, impacting the larger world.

Create a **Dreamer’s Window** as a class.

- Dedicate a bulletin board (or poster board) for your classroom Dreamer’s Window.
- Use blue paper as a background and strips of brown or white paper to make a window frame.
- Invite students to write or dictate a hope they have for themselves, others, or world, then add it to the board. (Keep up the theme using cloud or star shapes.)

- Schedule time—bimonthly, or at the end of each term—to choose one or two hopes that your class can make actionable together. Then guide your students in crafting a simple statement, moving from hope (“recycle more”) to goal (“recycle paper in our class,” “teach our families about good recycling habits,” or “participate in a park cleanup”).



Allow children to add other hopes—for themselves, others, or the world—throughout the year. As time allows, challenge them to discuss how a selected hope could become an actionable goal in your community or school.

LIKE THIS

Learn to
play guitar

Be a good
friend

Recycle
more

5 CENTER DELIGHT AND CELEBRATION

An important part of social-emotional learning is celebrating—all year long. Make delight and celebration an intentional and frequent part of your classroom community. Don't shy away from recognizing the small steps kids make throughout the month, week, or even within a single day!

Recognize growth with SEL Affirmation Cards.

- The affirmation cards on the following page can be printed and shared to celebrate students' social-emotional growth. Each one recognizes a particular value, with a few blank cards to create your own.
- You can award the cards publicly, place them on students' desks during recess, or allow students to distribute the cards to one another.
- You might also take a group approach by placing a set of cards and bowl somewhere in the classroom. When a student notices one of these values in a peer, they can place the appropriate card in the

bowl, with the option of writing their classmate's name on the card. When the bowl is full, have students suggest a way to celebrate together.



At the end of this document, you'll find the **Joyful Beginnings Pledge**, including each of the five strategies in student-friendly language. Print the pledge to hang it in your classroom and/or distribute to students, adding your own community values in the spaces provided. (Note: You can print and write by hand, or type directly into the editable fields.) Then e-mail it to social.emotional@zaner-bloser.com so we can share your unique pledge with our SEL community!

LIKE THIS

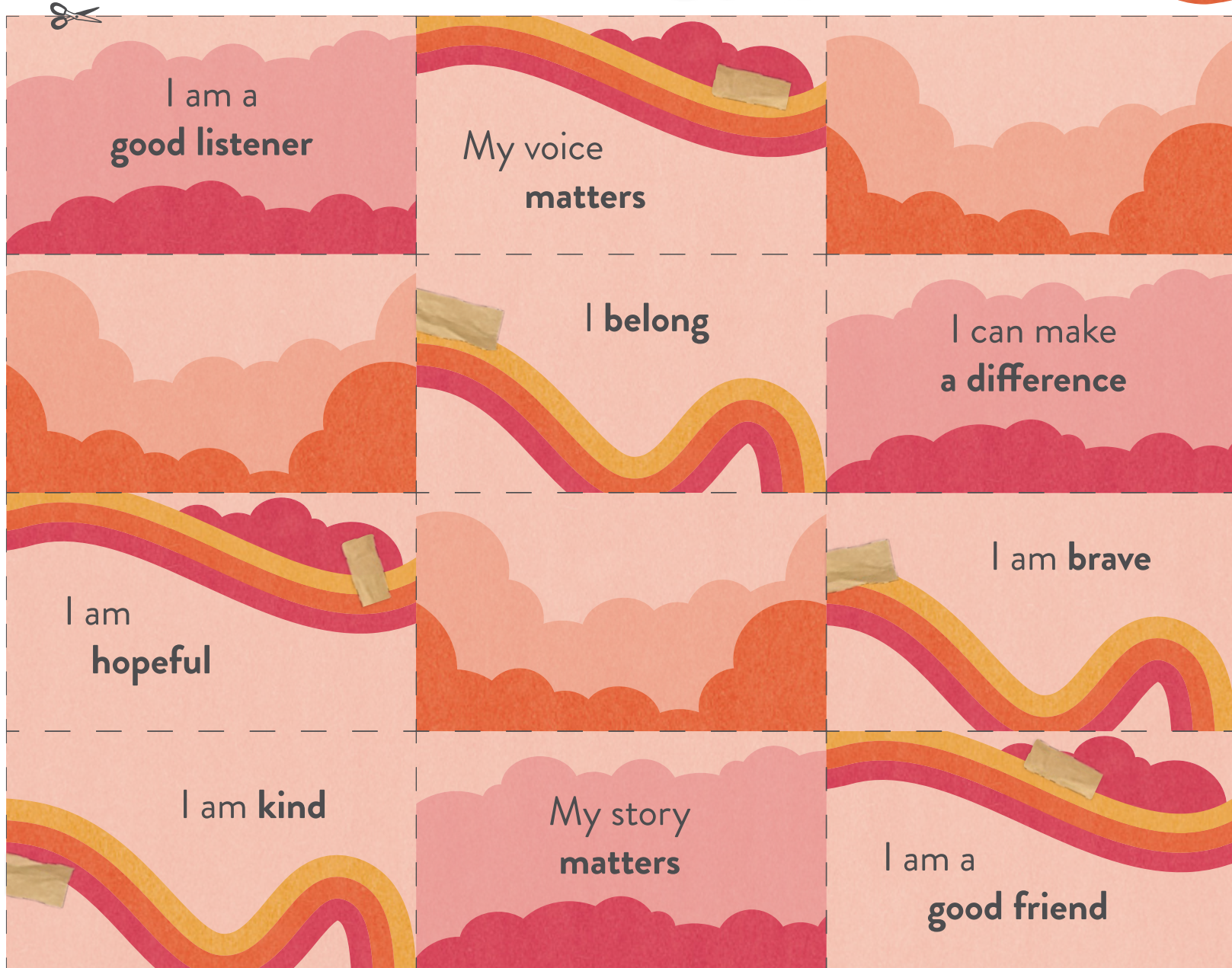
I belong

My story matters

I can change the world

SEL AFFIRMATION CARDS

Create your own



JOYFUL BEGINNINGS

PLEDGE

1 Each of us **belongs** here.

2 Our community includes **every voice**.

3 We listen and make space for **every story**.

4 We are **hopeful**. We can change the world!

5 We **celebrate** together.

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

E-mail us your pledge at social.emotional@zaner-bloser.com and we'll share it with our SEL community via social media!

#joyfulbeginnings