**Lesson Plan for *Brave Space Activity***

**Supporting Productive Dialogue and**

**Cultivating Brave Spaces in our Classrooms**

This simple activity was developed over the years by **Nii Armah Sowah and Beth Osnes,** who co- teach Performance and Community Engagement through the **University of Colorado** **Department of Theatre & Dance.** This is open source and can be used in any educational or organizational setting to put anti-racism and equity into action.

*Note—the terms ‘safe’ and ‘brave’-- both used in this activity-- are terms being used in many contexts from Black Lives Matter to student service programming on campuses. Our call for a “brave” space in classroom dialogues seeks to support productive dialogue. We recognize the vital importance of safety and safe spaces for especially marginalized populations and the establishment of safe zones within campus. Many campuses have found the language of cultivating a brave space useful for supporting productive dialogue. Given that we need to use words to communicate with each other to work towards greater equity, inclusion, and an anti-racist world, we offer this activity using these words available to us now. We acknowledge that they may be imperfect placeholders at this point in our collective development. We note that the open and critical dialogue about these terms and this activity can help us in this productive evolution forwards towards greater equity and inclusion. At the end of this lesson plan are some writings that may invigorate this conversation. Please share ideas for improving this tool and/or your experiences with* [*beth.osnes@colorado.edu*](mailto:beth.osnes@colorado.edu) *and* [*sowah@colorado.edu*](mailto:sowah@colorado.edu)*.*

**The *Brave Space Activity* can support your class in creating a brave space to foster respectful but challenging dialogue within the classroom.** You can use this participatory activity to cultivate a trusting community to support productive and difficult conversations. It can be used for in-person and remote teaching settings through video conferencing. We base this activity on the seminal article by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice.” This activity is one of many offered on our Community Performance Toolbox created an online toolbox for in-person activities through Buffs Create.

***Our classrooms can be places where we can have productive and courageous dialogues about issues of race and other related issues. The work of being an anti-racist is for all people. The use of this lesson plan is one action to put being an anti-racist into productive action within our own community.***

**Objectives of the *Brave Space Activity*:**

-fostering a brave space within your class  
-ensuring controversy with civility  
-owning your intention and your impact  
-exploring what factors influence your decision to challenge yourself  
-exploring what respect looks like to different people and groups of people in various contexts

-practicing asking clarifying questions

**Estimated Amount of Time Required:**

50-75 minutes (approximate times are listed for each activity, each activity can take more or less time based on your individual class and how much time you allocate for conversation)

**Class Size:**

10-50 students is optimal for this activity so that when you break the class into 5 groups there are at least 2 students in each group and no more than 10 in each group, however we encourage you to be creative in using this with any class

**Supplies/Equipment Needed:**

-Shared Google Doc (or other online platform) to co-write Class Guidelines

-(in person) Projector or monitor for sharing Google Doc with class (and/or any other accessibly equipment needed so all students can participate in this activity)

-(in person or video conference) Padlet is a teaching with technology tool that can be used for student group work described below. See example: <https://padlet.com/osnesb/bjy2rf6egbhhlnhq>

**Useful Definitions:**

**Agent or Dominant Group**—members of the dominant social group in the US, privileged by birth or acquisition, which knowingly or unknowingly exploit and reap unfair advantage over members of groups that are targets of oppression. Agents of oppression are also trapped by the system of institutionalized oppression that benefits them and are confined to roles and prescribed behaviors. In United States culture, agents have the power to define the “norm” for what is reality and they see themselves as normal or proper, whereas targets are likely to be labeled as deviant, evil, abnormal, substandard, or defective (from https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs?s=power+privelege&submit=).

**Target Group--** Targets of oppression are members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, and victimized in a variety of ways by agents of oppression and the agent’s systems or institutions. Targets of oppression are subject to containment, having their choices and movements restricted and limited, are seen and treated as expendable and replaceable, without an individual identity apart from their group, and are compartmentalized into narrowly defined roles.

Targets of oppression are people subjected to exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Targets of oppression are kept in their place by the agent of oppression’s ideology, which supports oppression by denying that it exists and blames the conditions of oppression on actions of the targets.

Targets of oppression have fewer “life chances” or benefits as a result of their membership in a particular social group. As examples, there is a higher likelihood that African American males will be arrested than Caucasian males; there is a greater chance that males will have a higher salary than females; and there is a higher probability that persons using a wheelchair for mobility will have fewer job opportunities than non-disabled people (from https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs?s=power+privelege&submit=).

**Assigned Reading for Students:** (optional but recommended)

- Brian Arao, and Kristi Clemens (2013) “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice.” *The Art of Effective Facilitation*. Stylus Publishing, pages 135-150.

-We suggest also assigning a reading that critiques the use of these terms ‘safe’ and ‘brave,’ such as <https://medium.com/@amarquez628/safe-and-brave-spaces-b9a3b51e107f>

**Additional Background Reading for Instructor:**

- John Palfrey (2017). *Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education.* MIT Press: Cambridge MA.

-The link below provides an excellent history of the phrases Brave Space and Safe Space within university settings. See select quotes in appendix:

<https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Policy_and_Practice_No_2_Safe_Brave_Spaces.pdf>

**Introduction:**

**Introduce Objectives of Activity: 0:00-0:05 minutes**

We will be doing an activity in class today to support us in having respectful but challenging dialogue within the classroom. This will foster a brave space within our class, which includes: (can ask volunteers to read each of the following points)  
-ensuring controversy with civility  
-owning your intention and your impact  
-exploring what factors influence your decision to challenge yourself  
-exploring what respect looks like to different people and groups of people in various contexts

-practicing asking clarifying questions

**Discussion Question:** Why might it be useful to do this as we begin to form a classroom community?

**Warm Up Exercise:**

**R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Tell me what it means to *you*: 0:10-0:20 minutes**

-Respect means having regard for the feelings, rights, customs, and wishes of others. However, respect can be expressed differently by different people and groups of people. Some families may respectfully interrupt each other in a lively manner over the dinner table, and other families might find that behavior to be disrespectful. Let’s explore what respect means to you.

-(in person) With a partner take turns finishing the following prompts.

-(on Zoom) As I give each of the following prompts, finish each in the Chat box. After you write yours, read some of the other responses.

-I feel respected when…

-One way I show respect is…

-Respect is important to me because…

-One expression of respect that may be unique to my family/community/nation/state

is…

-(in person) Converse with your partner about the variety of ways that respect can be expressed, experienced, and understood. Did anything surprise you? What did you notice?

-(on Zoom) Invite conversation among the class about the variety of ways that respect can be expressed, experiences, and understood. Did anything surprise you? What did you notice? Share your thoughts and insights aloud or write them in the chat box.

**Main Activity:**

-**Background and Getting into Groups:** **0:20-0:35 minutes**

Historically common classroom ground rules include:

“agree to disagree”

“don’t take things personally”

“challenge by choice”

“respect”

“no attacks”

The authors of “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” believe that unexamined, these common ground rules may contribute to the conflation of safely and comfort and restrict participant engagement and learning (page 143).

**Optional Discussion Question**: Why do you think it might be helpful to transition from the use of the phrase “safe space” to “brave space” in regard to classroom dialogues?

The goal of the following activity is to support students in creating their own Class Guidelines for fostering respectful but challenging dialogue within their classroom by committing to the creation of a brave space. This activity will be done in groups.

**-Divide students into 5 groups.**

(in person) have students count of by 5s, and have all students with the same number sit together in a group.

(on video conference) assign an equal number of students to one of 5 break out rooms, be sure to give all instructions below *before* sending students to breakout rooms.

**-Assign each group a number from 1-5** (see below for assigning a Common Rule to each group number).

**-Ask each group to take the next ten minutes to explore this Common Rule and the alternative to this Common Rule offered by the reading “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces**.” Invite students to learn from this reading while also adding their own critiques and improvements. Ask each group to write their own Class Guideline based on the section of reading they were assigned, can be just a few sentences long. The class guideline they write will be used by your class throughout the semester to guide and inspire a brave space for productive dialogue. Ask students to write their Class Guidelines in order from 1-5 into your common Google Doc during this time. Inform students that they will be asked to informally present their Class Guideline and explain why they wrote it in the way they did.

**-Take Space/Make Space**--Ask the students to self-regulate while working together as a group so that all voices are heard. If you as a student feel you are talking more than other students, make space for other voices. If you feel you are not contributing much to the conversation, consider taking space by adding your voice as much as you feel able and willing. Remind *all* students that they can use their voices to create an equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist world. Being an anti-racist is for everybody.

**-Put the following blue text in the shared Google Doc so students can write their Class Guideline beneath their assigned group number (or use Padlet, described above under Supplies/Equipment Needed).** Make sure students can access the shared Google Doc with the blue text below pasted at the head of the Google Doc to guide them in this part of the activity.

Group 1: Common Rule 1--From *Agree to Disagree* to *Controversy with Civility,* read and consult your section page 143-144 in “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”

(Group 1 add Class Guideline here)

Group 2: Common Rule 2--From *Don’t Take Things Personally* to *Own Your Intentions and Your Impact,* read and consult your section page 144-146 in “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”

(Group 2 add Class Guideline here)

Group 3: Common Rule 3--From *Challenge by Choice* to *Explore what factors influence your decision to challenge yourself ,* read and consult your section page 146-147 in “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”

(Group 3 add Class Guideline here)

Group 4: Common Rule 4--From *Respect* to *Exploring Ways of Behaving with Respect,* read and consult your section page 147-148 in “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”

(Group 4 add Class Guideline here)

Group 5: Common Rule 5--From *No Attacks* (extreme disrespect) to *Clarifying Conversation*, read and consult your section page 148-149 in “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”

(Group 5 add Class Guideline here)

-Give groups 10 minutes to do the instructions listed above. If on video conference, send students to their Breakout Groups now.

**Share Each Group’s Class Guideline with the Entire Class: 0:35-60 minutes**

**-In order from 1-5, ask groups to present their guideline one at a time**.

(in person, project the Google Doc for all to read so one student in the group can be making edits and changes based on class feedback and recommendations)

(on video conference, screen share the Google Doc and have the presenting group members selected as presenters so they are visible to the class)

**-Invite all students to ask clarifying questions and suggest edits or changes**.

-Once all of the groups have edited their Class Guideline based on class input, congratulate the class on having co-creating their own personalized set of guidelines for fostering a brave space! This can be a living document that grows and changes according to needs that arise. Be sure each student has a copy of these Class Guidelines and post on your class website or online platform.

**Closing Discussion Questions: 0:60-75 minutes**

In what instances can you imagine these guidelines being useful?

Can you identify any co-benefits from the process of created this list of Class Guidelines together as a class?

What about this process did you find challenging?

In what ways might this advance and/or support the class in navigating difficult conversations together?

How might we as a class revisit or make adjustments to these guidelines if the need arises?

**Ask each student to be sure they save and/or can access this co-created document to guide them in the coming semester.**

**The End**

**Appendix:**

Select quotes from <https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Policy_and_Practice_No_2_Safe_Brave_Spaces.pdf>

From page 3-4: The term *brave space* was first popularized by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) in chapter eight—“From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces”—of their book *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators*. In it, a brave space within a classroom environment contains five main elements:

“Controversy with civility,” where varying opinions are accepted

“Owning intentions and impacts,” in which students acknowledge and discuss instances where a dialogue has affected the emotional well-being of another person

“Challenge by choice,” where students have an option to step in and out of challenging conversations

 “Respect,” where students show respect for one another’s basic personhood

“No attacks,” where students agree not to intentionally inflict harm on one another

From page 8: **Adopt the use of the term *brave spaces***. Language is important and may contribute to misconceptions of the goals of creating inclusive environments. This paper has shown that a safe space is never actually safe. The concept of a brave space encompasses all of what the sectors discussed in this work regard as safe spaces, but clarifies that these environments are challenging and that students are expected to participate within them. **Administrators, faculty, and staff can replace use of the term *safe space*, as it pertains to class-based dialogues, with that of *brave space***. By using the term *brave space*, faculty are able to distinguish an inclusive classroom discussion from programming on campus that commonly provides respite space for traditionally marginalized communities.

**From a student blogpost:**

https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/05/15/why-your-brave-space-sucks/

An Excerpt from this blogpost: “Expecting marginalized peoples to perform the labor of education is not social justice; it’s exploitation.

Every single space in which we exist as trans people, indigenous people, Black and brown peoples, disabled people, women and femmes, queer people and/or working class people is a “brave space.” Those of us willing to spend even more time being “brave” to educate unaware audiences are doing them an immeasurable favor, filling in the gaping holes left by an education system that erases indigenous and people of color’s histories, a media that demonizes women and femmes and innumerable other institutions in society that reinforce a cornucopia of inequities.

To all those who interact with brave spaces, if the importance of this labor isn’t acknowledged, then your brave space sucks. If privileged people are gaining knowledge at the expense of marginalized peoples’ well-being, then your brave space sucks. And if your brave space absolutely, necessarily requires marginalized people to be doing the teaching – then you damn better be paying them a living wage for their work. Or your brave space will suck.”

**From John Palfrey’s book *Safe Paces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free***

“The American experiment at its best calls for diversity and free expression to coexist. That coexistence has not been easy, nor has it been all that successful, especially for those who have had less power. The American experience has been a lot easier for whites, males, Christians, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, and the wealthy in particular. And free expression has been interpreted in ways that have tended to support those in authority rather than all people equitably. These critiques of the American experiment are all grounded in historical truth. But it is also true that free expression can serve all of us. Diversity is about self-expression, leaning from one another, working together in productive ways across differences, and in turn strengthening our democracy. Diversity that also encompasses and supports intellectual and academic freedom—without condoning hate speech—has enormous force, promise, and importance (page 9).”

**Supporting Tools:**

**Prompts for Non-violent Modes of Communication:** Non-violent communication includes steering clear of judging, guilt, humiliation, shame, blame, coercion, or threats, and staying honest and compassionate in our consideration of ourselves and others. Encouraging your students to utilize the following prompts when sharing their views, feelings, reactions, or experience can maintain civility within controversy.

I observe…

I feel…

I need…

I request…

+Obtain feedback.

(see https://www.cdss.org/images/organizers-resources/4-Can-We-Talk.pdf)

**Here are some tips you might use to avoid *saying* hurtful words:**

-Slow down to give yourself time to think, be okay with silence or even ask for time.

-Manage your curiosity. Do you really need to know?

-What’s the *second* thing you could say? (besides, “wow, you are so tall for a woman”)

-Apologize, and say it another way.

-Ask, “what is a better way to say…?”

-Ask if it’s okay to ask.

**Here are some tips you might use to respond to hurtful words you *hear*:**

-“Can you explain that to me? What are you really trying to say?”

-“Can I help you reword that question or comment?”

-“That *(\_\_joke, word, comment*\_\_) isn’t worthy of you.”

-“When I hear you say that, it makes me feel sad. I’ve had a different experience with…”

(developed by SPEAK.WORLD in partnership with Young Women’s Vocal Empowerment, nine Boulder high school students who created these tips for a workshop they developed and facilitated entitled “little words, BIG ISSUES”)

**University of Colorado, Boulder Campus Resources:**

<https://www.colorado.edu/health/2020/05/03/healthy-buffs-how-make-most-tough-conversations>

<https://www.colorado.edu/dontignoreit/how-help/bystander-intervention>

Campus offers many resources for support, activism, and education, including:

* [Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement:](http://click.communications.cu.edu/?qs=38a62578fc4f547d38742eb9d565d12773d03e4824797892fff6ebb1479ad163c79218351df0bfe012445b51b29a7d3764e14a6e59d3066d) Partners with departments and units across campus to create inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all students.
* [Office of Victim Assistance:](http://click.communications.cu.edu/?qs=38a62578fc4f547d290f4547ed2497d72890b2600c1f1197c2a5daabee6e91fd24e80b935177b43a2795b390345d1980c53d4f2f183d09ff) Provides the campus community with counseling support and advocacy.
* [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance:](http://click.communications.cu.edu/?qs=38a62578fc4f547d332d88d2a6b30d3f9d12d4e97db04d34e4984b8f41448e41028cd9e1388738c6a31c021418a3a9b4829952ee8063f005) Implements and enforces policies against discrimination and harassment within the campus community.
* [Black Student Alliance:](http://click.communications.cu.edu/?qs=38a62578fc4f547d352d1b01756488d0cabed1d45a814233e8389fb685e94e5755503b5e0efa1a08b42a26857a138839864c2d96bd9c54ac) Serves as an advocate of the Black/African American student and as ally to all other underrepresented voices on campus.
* [Center for Inclusion and Social Change:](http://click.communications.cu.edu/?qs=38a62578fc4f547da2f9d49c9bc4b168a0a1862a1a7d47244b35a91994421a4fb6af465aa272841acb84004377c2ac12be7904db72adfc0c) Supports all students in the exploration of their identities and creates a welcoming and inclusive space on campus that supports academic and personal growth.

Please share your experiences with us and your ideas for improving upon this activity-- [*beth.osnes@colorado.edu*](mailto:beth.osnes@colorado.edu) *and* [*sowah@colorado.edu*](mailto:sowah@colorado.edu)

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