

A Brief Bubbler Guide for Making Justice Facilitating Artists



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WHO are we?

[Making Justice](https://www.teenbubbler.org//programs/making-justice) (<https://www.teenbubbler.org//programs/making-justice>): is a diverse collective of artists, activists, educators and students addressing learning gaps that disproportionately impact minority youth in Dane County, Wisconsin. People are at the heart of Making Justice, which fosters community-building to remedy racial inequities. Although our primary focus is underserved youth, all Making Justice participants—teens, peer learners, facilitators, and staff—benefit from the opportunity to connect with diverse community members. Part of this learning process has been recognizing how we contribute to Dane County inequities. Our participants represent a wealth of resources that support program and community building.

The students are teens in the Dane County Juvenile Court Detention Center, the Dane County Juvenile Court Shelter Home, the Neighborhood Intervention Program, and specific classrooms within Madison Metropolitan School District. The students we work with are currently (or have recently been) involved with the justice system at some level. We are there to engage them, have fun and hopefully share some of our curiosity, skills and knowledge.

Peer learners may include undergraduate and graduate students from UW Madison, YALI (Young African Leader's Initiative) participants or others. Peer learners are there to participate and learn along with the teens.

Artist Facilitators are artists from the community who come in to lead a workshop. This can include painters, sculptors, puppeteers, filmmakers, photographers, musicians, djs, poets, writers, dancers, performance artists and more.

Staff are the people who take care of the logistics on both ends. This will include teen librarian Jesse Vieau and other Bubbler team members as well as the guards and teachers at the shelter and detention center. Staff are a critical part of the Making Justice program and it's success rests on the relationships we have built.

WHY do we do this work?

We do this work for many reasons:

The Bubbler is a hub for creative expression. We want to engage people of all ages through art creation and appreciation, engagement with new and old-school technology, and hands-on making. Our team strives to offer basic access for all Madison residents and extended access for targeted, under-served, underrepresented populations and groups.

The Madison Public Library curates and provides public access to physical resources like books, computers and spaces; and digital resources like e-books, internet and electronic subscriptions.

Using the library model, the Bubbler curates and provides public access to the people and equipment in our community including teaching artists, the Media Lab, and other community assets.

Inequality in Dane County is a persistent problem. Recent local and national studies have suggested that Dane County is home to some stunningly wide black/white disparities on several significant outcome measures, especially those relating to the criminal justice system and to educational achievement. Race to Equity 2013. Black Dane County teens are 13 times more likely to be growing up in poverty than their white neighbors. Half will not graduate from high school on time. These disparities contribute to a pipeline of accumulating risk factors that too often ends in the justice system.



WHY art? "We're Bubbling today!?"

Art and related creative endeavors offer unique and multi-faceted ways to engage. Engagement might look like everyone laughing while trying to make a sound on a trumpet for the first time. It might look like folks sitting around a table, listening to music and intently drawing abstract patterns on a canvas. It might look like teens ignoring the instructions from the facilitating artist to ask YALI scholars questions like, "what kind of food do you eat in Kenya?" It might look like everyone sitting in a circle, clapping a beat and trying to say their name in rhythm - it's harder than you might think! And making the effort means you're engaging.

Creative endeavors give teens a voice - an opportunity to tell their stories and an opportunity for their stories to be heard..

Art gives us a way to model modes of learning that are likely to be very different from the teens' prior experiences in school.

Art workshops can open up possibilities, teach new skills and bring new people into the teens' lives.

Of all the disciplines, art is the most open-ended... art stimulates the creative mind more than any other discipline. The creative mind develops cognitive flexibility; can examine situations, objects and issues from multiple perspectives; and can propose novel solutions to persistent problems. (Erickson, 2007, p. 17)

Creative endeavors offer an opportunity for the teens to experience a sense of flow. According to psychologist and professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow is a psychological state of total engagement that can be so immersive we lose track of time. A flow state is where people are their happiest as they engage in activities that utilize both their abilities and natural interest in learning.

Some important guidelines that help create flow include:

- Having clear, step by step goals
- Seeing immediate results (i.e., an impression in a piece of clay, a sound on a trombone)
- An equal match of skills and challenge - having the basic tools to do what's asked
- No fear of failure

Creative activities offer a chance to practice development of 16 life-skills or "Habits of Mind" that "provide the individual with skills to work through real life situations that equip that person to respond using awareness (cues), thought, and intentional strategy in order to gain a positive outcome" (Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, Habits of Mind: A Developmental Series, 2000)

- Persisting
- Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- Managing impulsivity
- Gathering data through all senses
- Listening with understanding and empathy
- Creating, imagining, innovating
- Thinking flexibly
- Responding with wonderment and awe
- Thinking about thinking (metacognition)
- Taking responsible risks
- Striving for accuracy
- Finding humor
- Questioning and posing problems
- Thinking interdependently
- Applying past knowledge to new situations
- Remaining open to continuous learning

HOW do we do it?
HOW does the learning and teaching happen?
HOW do teens process information?
HOW can I plan my workshop?

Making Justice is based in experiential learning – hands on activities. This is how the learning and teaching happens - through doing. Our ideal outcome is for the teens to be fully engaged - totally immersed in the act of doing - during the workshop. Conversation and relationship building takes place while working on the project. This is not always possible. Some factors that contribute to the teen's willingness to engage may include:

- Normal teen development. Teens are dealing with changes in brain development, socio-emotional needs and societal roles. This can be a confusing time for a lot of people and can result in difficulty or inconsistency when engaging.
- Prior experience: if something is familiar, we feel comfortable doing it; when something is new, we may feel anxiety about trying it. This anxiety can be presented as defensiveness, anger or resistance.
- Negative experience: Some of our students may have had negative experiences regarding learning and/or school that impact how they respond to our workshops.
- Stress: Many of the teens we work with deal with extreme distress in their lives. This can affect their mental and emotional availability at any given time or around any given topic. It can also affect their tolerance for the "unknown." Many of our teens need structure, clear guidelines and explicit expectations.
- Fatigue: Some of our students may display a lack of interest due to very real fatigue or exhaustion (from lack of sleep, insomnia, medication or other reasons).

Tips for working with teens:

- Learn and use names (as best you can!).
- Keep in mind that some of the teens may have sensory processing issues – noises, textures, or movements may affect them in ways you don't expect. Always take a student's statement of discomfort seriously.
- We suggest you use very specific encouragement, i.e. "Whoa, you really kept working on that until you figured it out!" or "I like that shade of blue a lot - it looks great with the orange." Avoid vague feedback such as "good job!" It doesn't carry much weight with teens.
- Give some brief information about yourself. The teens will buy into your workshop more fully if they can see who you are. Sharing a bit of yourself makes you more believable.
- Be confident in yourself. Be very clear on why you're there and what you can offer.
- You don't need to relate to the teens by being "like" them. You're different and you're there to show them something new.
- Make the material relevant to their lives when possible – without asking them to reflect on their lives :)
- Don't be afraid. These teens may give you attitude, but it's nothing you can't handle. Other people are there for the discipline - let that go, it's not your job.
- But do be assertive. You're the adult and the expert with something to share.
- Keep in mind that these teens are not choosing to be in your workshop.

- Remember these are kids in some respects. Be patient. But also remember they are on the verge of adulthood - they want to be seen and treated as young adults, not children.
- Incorporate the most adult-like materials possible. The teens will resist materials that they associate with being a little kid. They want to be grown-up. For example, they will prefer paint markers over crayons.
- Sensitive topics might include discussion of feelings, family, school, weekends, the outside world or inside world (if they are in detention). Use caution.
- Embarrassment is a big thing for teens – try to avoid anything that might require them to do something they would consider embarrassing – they won't go for it. You, however, should embarrass yourself all you want (within reason and on topic) – if you can take risks and be imperfect, you show that being vulnerable is okay in this context - this may help them loosen up.
- This is about having fun. Any learning should be wrapped into doing. On the same note, avoid lecturing. This isn't "school" - it's something different. The learning happens by doing.
- Let go of an agenda that your students must "learn" something from you in 90 minutes. Just engaging them is enough.
- At the same time, sharing a skill is great. If you can teach them to do something concrete in 90 minutes, do it!
- Be prepared to teach in a variety of ways - people learn differently.
- Don't take anything personally. This isn't about you. It's about the teens. There are many things that are beyond your control or even your knowledge. Keep your focus on the work. Let the teens engage to the extent that they are able or willing. You are providing an opportunity. What they do with that opportunity is up to them!
- **Have fun!!!!**

How do I plan my workshop?

1. Introduce the project and the people!

You'll want to jump right into your project, so think about what kind of introduction will be the most dynamic. Maybe a few images, a little bit of information about yourself - something to give the participants the tools and inspiration to get started.

Personal introductions should happen at some point in the 90 minutes. These don't need to be in the beginning, but getting names and voices into the room is important. In the past, we have used "ice-breakers" but we are finding these don't always achieve the intended goals so we are in the process of re-defining this portion of the workshop. Talk with Jesse to brainstorm for effective ways to approach the idea of warming everyone up, creating a sense of community and getting names out into the room. See last page in this booklet for more info!

2. Main Project!

Have tangible goals that are very clearly communicated in a step-by-step way. What do you hope to accomplish by the end? What's the end goal? How will you get them there? Keep in mind, the teens may take the project in their own direction - and that's a good thing!

3. Wrap-up or reflection (if possible)

Maybe a one word response - what did you learn? What happened today that was new for you?

Before the workshop:

- Be extremely prepared with a very detailed plan - then be ready to change it all and go with the flow.
- Problem solving can be a good way to frame projects - make sure it's open ended enough to include a variety of "solutions."
- The teens often love giving things to their family – projects that can be gifts are great (but definitely not the only great projects!)
- Make sure any resources are truly helpful - teens can really get bored watching videos!
- Simplify. It's better to have a simple, completed project than a complicated, unfinished one.
- Figure in extra time for repeating your instructions. You will repeat yourself. A LOT. That's okay!
- Scan your lesson plan and check to see if you're using concrete language whenever possible – abstract language can be confusing and open to interpretation.
- Have several versions of your project – if the class gets hung up on one step, how will you speed up the process so you make it to the end? **more than one plan, entry point** best outcomes - let it all go, let kids take the opening.
- Walk through all demos and activities on your own to be sure your plan will work
- Prepare a back up plan – what if something doesn't work? What will you do?

During the workshop:

- Start with your warm-up or ice-breaker. This can help you read the room. Improvise if needed.
- Tell the teens exactly what will happen. “We will do A., B. and then C.”
- Get right into the project. Give them just what they need in the moment to be able to do the first step of the project. Dead air at the beginning of a workshop can lead to chaos and disinterest. If possible, have them doing something physical within the first few minutes of the workshop (this can be part of the warm-up).
- Manage your time. Stay on track, try to get to a resolution at the end of the 90 minutes. The teens want to succeed. You help them by making sure they can accomplish something by the end.
- Leave time at the end for brief reflection of some kind – this may be just looking at what they completed, or it might involve a brief statement of one thing they learned.



WHAT can I expect?
WHAT is expected of me?

Prepare yourself to be met with silence, slow responses and a lack of eye contact. If you ask a general question to the whole group, you may receive zero responses. This can be for any number of reasons - they may be reluctant to speak up (which is understandable); they may not know the answer; or they may be thinking of a "safe" answer. If it's important to ask this question of them, take two or three breaths as you wait for a response. If no one answers, ask your question in a new way. Another tip is to have them vote (eewwww or cool) or ask the question in a way that they can critique you (turn the tables and give them the power).

Keep your expectations reasonable: you can't accomplish as much as you do in your studio.

Have some tricks in your back pocket in case the project goes south. Always read the room. Continuously assess the vibe. Be ready to improvise. Be patient. Make sure your plan is flexible enough that you can comfortably accommodate unexpected snags. You are the model – if you are feeling anxious the teens will pick up on it.



What is expected of me?

We love that you want to be here. The teens appreciate your commitment and - even though you probably won't hear this from them - your efforts mean a lot to them. So focus on finding what you are excited about and we look forward to supporting you! To help you out, here are a few guidelines:

DO:

Be on time. Be prepared. This shows respect for the students. These teens feel "let down" by many adults - don't be one of them!

Clear your materials prior to the workshop. Many things are not permitted (pens, for instance) so make sure your supplies are OK.

Do build relationships with the teens by letting them lead the conversations - particularly on personal issues like family.

DON'T:

Do not take photographs. This is not legally permitted. You can ask Jesse for documentation - he will be happy to help with that!

Don't touch anyone. You do not know the types of possible trauma the teens may have faced in the past. Your well-meaning touch (shoulder squeeze, pat on the back) can be triggering, and it is a violation of their personal autonomy.

Don't show anger or become aggressive. If someone gets loud, don't get loud back. Lower your voice - that's way more effective.

Don't ask what happened that led to their current situation. Teens in the detention center, in particular, are prohibited from discussing their cases. Be aware that what may be a safe conversation to you may not be safe for them,

Don't be a disciplinarian. You are NOT responsible for discipline in the classroom. However, your observations and actions matter. Model ideal behavior. And if you see a problem, tell someone who can do something about it (such as Jesse or another staff person).

INTRODUCTIONS

(formerly known as “ice breakers”)

We’d love them to happen sometime in the 90 minutes. It’s important to get the teens’ names and voices into the room, but we want to do it in the most useful way possible. This is an area we are developing - we have lots of experience with things that have worked (or not) in the past, and we also want to hear what you think would work for you. One guiding question is: what is important about this exercise? How can we keep that focus? Here are some tips from our old “ice breaker” days,

Ice breakers work best if you can get the kids to escape from their current world a little bit and let’s them be creative or inventive. Ask them to say their name, and then answer one warm-up question. Physical action - like clapping a beat - can be great! Have at least 3 ready – you might have to adjust mid-exercise!

Some ice breakers that have worked:

- What is your favorite color?
- If you could go travel in the world, where would you go?
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
- If you could get any tattoo, what would you get? (observe center rules: no gang symbols)
- If you could have any slice of pie what kind would you have?
- What is your favorite dessert?
- What is your favorite breakfast food?
- Maintain a beat by clapping your hands and legs - say your name in time with the beat.
- Richard Jones’ ice breaker (ask Jesse)
- Name tag exercise - bring name tags and cool markers and let the teens write their names as you’re setting up the workshop.

Ice Breakers to AVOID:

- What did you have for breakfast? (or lunch or dinner - they all ate the same food)
- What did you do this weekend? (or last weekend or next weekend)
- Asking them to name something that they might not know anything about.
- Things that involve writing or reading - not all the teens can.

THANK YOU.

Thank you for your time and for your energy. We are so excited you're here. Please let us know if you have ANY questions, and remember that this is - above all - about having fun!

With love, Team Bubbler!

Making Justice was built by a large team of youth advocates around the city of Madison. Read more about the [making of Making Justice](#)

[<https://www.teenbubbler.org/behind-the-scenes/making-making-justice>]

This booklet created by the Bubbler Team and Lauren Scanlon, August 2019