Below are three activities that can facilitate relationship-building within the classroom and help students begin to reflect on their own teacher identity. “Centering” students’ lived experiences provides the opportunity to use students’ prior knowledge and cultural assets to build new knowledge. This ultimately (and hopefully) deepens students’ understanding of their racialized histories and gives them the dispositions they need to engage families.

Dr. Yasmin Morales-Alexander, 2020
### Activity 1: “Multicultural Wheel”

**Purpose:**
- To set the tone for the ways in which I expect us to work for the remainder of the semester: active and collaborative engagement
- To privilege everyone’s “voice”
- To “center” the students in their own learning
- To informally introduce students to the theoretical/conceptual frameworks guiding the course

**Steps:**
1. Upon entering the classroom students are greeted and instructed to get a blank sheet of paper. On this paper they are to draw a circle in the middle and write their name(s) in that circle.
2. Next, they are to draw lines coming out of the circle—as many lines as they choose. I tell them to think of it as a “wheel”. When they’ve drawn their lines, they are instructed to write words on each line to describe who they are; obviously the more lines they’ve drawn, the more descriptive words they’ll have.
3. Once they’ve completed their “Multicultural Wheel”, they are asked to walk around the room and introduce themselves to each other by looking at each other’s “wheels”; identifying the lines in which they’ve used similar descriptive words. They are to write each other’s names on these lines. They are encouraged to introduce themselves (share their “wheel”) to everyone. For at least 20 minutes, the room is abuzz with conversation, and in many instances, laughter—as students both recognize the many things they have in common as well as things that make them unique.
4. As the facilitator, I purposefully engage in this activity as well. By doing so, students immediately are provided with a concrete example of how a “teacher” defines her/himself; by listing my own words—I am bringing MY identities into the learning/teaching space. In addition, I purposefully choose words that describe my “visible” (female, teacher, short), “invisible” (procrastinator, spiritual), and “visible-invisible” (Black-Latina, family-oriented) identities.
5. As a group, we “officially” introduce ourselves by sharing the things (words) we had most in common and the areas in which we connected the least. This “share-out” provides the foundation for my introduction to the inter-related topics of: “culture, identity, & teacher practice” that will be discussed throughout the remainder of the semester/course. I remind students that as people we have MORE in common than not, that we are ALL multi-cultural beings, and that we bring who we are (all those descriptive words—identity) both consciously and unconsciously into the classroom, into our interactions with families.

**Virtual Adaptation:**
1. Upon entering the virtual space, students are greeted and as part of the “introductions”, they are to write down:
   - Three words to describe themselves as a “person”, three words to describe themselves as a “learner”, and three words to describe themselves as an “educator”
   - In breakout rooms, they officially introduce themselves to each other and share why they chose their specific descriptive words
   - During a whole group discussion, we share the words that we had in common and those we didn’t
### Activity 2: Social Identity Wheel & Single Stories

**Purpose:**
- To role model what “identity” work requires: that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, reflection, and critical inquiry
- To build a sense of trust between me and the students which then generates rich and authentic conversations both in large and small groups
- To expose students to and provide an example of the complexities inherent in learning & understanding racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity—in a non-threatening way.
- To support students in seeing that there is diversity WITHIN groups, there is a difference among “racial”, “ethnic” and “linguistic” self-identifications, and that we CAN use our experiences to REJECT stereotypes, assumptions...

**Steps:**
1. Students watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TEDtalk, “The Danger of a Single Story”
2. Students then review the Social Identity Wheel handout and are asked to respond to questions 1, 4, & 5
3. As the instructor, I first share my responses to questions 1, 4, & 5 of the Social Identity Wheel followed by the details of my single story—that historically other Latinos, specifically, light-skinned ones, have visibly and verbally expressed shock when I (a dark-skinned Puerto Rican) speak Spanish--I also describe the ways in which that single story was emotionally & intellectually “jarring” in my “self-identity” development. Moreover, how that single story influences my work with students, children, and families.
4. Students then engage in teacher identity development by sharing out their responses to questions 1,4 & 5 followed by the danger of THEIR single story.

**Virtual Adaptation:**
1. Students work in break out rooms to discuss their responses to the questions embedded within the Social Identity Wheel activity and their take-aways from the TED talk.
Activity 3: Cultural Iceberg & Funds of Knowledge

Purpose:
- To provide a broader view of the concept of “culture”; that culture goes beyond “race”.
- To reinforce the use of a “strengths-based” perspective for ourselves and in our work with children & families.

Steps:
1. To begin this session I show a picture of an iceberg.
2. I then draw students’ attention to the cultural concepts that lie below the surface such as “gender roles”, “behavioral expectations”, “sense of time”.
3. I prompt reflection by posing the following questions:
   a. What did these cultural concepts “look” like in your family of origin? What messages did you receive related to these concepts? How did you receive/learn these messages? Of the messages you received, what have you kept (as an adult), what have you rejected? Why? How?
   b. In what ways do you think your cultural concepts mirror those of the children & families you work with? In what ways, do you think they are different? How do you know?
4. To further deepen this discussion, I share some of my own experiences to highlight the ways in which we both internalize and reject messages and the “tensions” within this ongoing process—as cultural processes are always being contested; in one way or another. For example, growing up I learned that my family (especially the older members) believed that children should be seen and not heard (deeply tied to the Latino cultural value of respeto), while I raised my own sons to be active participants in adult driven conversations (deeply tied to the American cultural value of individualism).
5. This conversation serves as the segue to introducing the concept of “Funds of Knowledge” where I use students’ personal experiences to highlight one of the major tenets of sociocultural theory that is directly related to a more comprehensive view of family engagement: there is more than one way to do something.
6. Students then complete this Funds of Knowledge activity

Virtual Adaptation:
1. Students are placed in breakout rooms and each breakout room is assigned to describe 1-3 FOK criteria based on their personal experiences. For example, Room 1: Home Language & Caregiving, Room 2: Educational Activities & Family Occupations

For additional texts that inspire see: