



## Inner Critic<sup>1</sup> Creative Challenge Lesson Plan

It is important to acknowledge the tender edges of human experience you will be navigating when you invite your students to “play” with their inner critics. Choosing to bring this experience to your students means taking risks and modeling vulnerability.

An emotionally-supportive environment is essential. This includes priming students with awareness of empathy; reminders that ‘mistakes are portals to discovery’; and acknowledgement that each student contributes unique assets to the class community.

### Objectives

- Explore relationship with self as foundational to relationship with others
- Bring awareness to the effects of negative self-talk
- Connect with peers; understand commonalities across our critics; normalize the inner critic
- Reframe ‘inner critic’, grow an inner ally (make an agreement with our inner critic)

**Time:** 2 class periods, minimum

**Group Structure:** Individual when sculpting and reflecting; then pairs or groups for sharing & playful dialogue

### Materials

1. Mixed media / Found & Re-used objects

Ideas - popsicle sticks, puffy balls, yarn, pens, glue, sequins, paper towel rolls, googly eyes. Natural materials - corn, twigs, beans, leaves, etc. etc. Fastening - masking tape, string, hot glue?, staples?

*What can you get where you live and work?*

2. Handout for sketch/reflection

### Set-up

Have a sample ready to share (your pre-made inner critic)

Gather & set out materials

Think about systems to prepare students for clean-up

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<sup>1</sup> this process has been adapted from a similar one experienced through Culture Jam, which originates from the Creative Empowerment Model created by Charlie Murphy and Peggy Taylor



Sequence-in-brief	Suggested minimum timing
1. Activate existing group agreements, empathetic 'container'	5 minutes
2. Intro to activity & teacher's inner critic	10 minutes
3. Materials overview & studio expectations	5 minutes
4. Studio time - build 3D representation	35 minutes
5. Clean up	5 minutes
6. Individual reflection using handout	15 minutes
7. Share - small groups, pairs, or gallery-style	15 minutes
8. Final reflection / discussion / closure	15 minutes

## PROCESS

1. **Container / Group Agreements** - re-engage students with their familiar language to establish an emotionally-supportive environment for creative exploration.
2. **Intro** - Teacher uses their inner critic to introduce the project. This is an opportunity for playfulness and vulnerability. For example, the inner critic can interrupt the teacher with critiques, throughout.

*We can be our own biggest critic. While sometimes our inner critic can help us out, they sometimes can get in our way. This next activity will help us get to know our inner critic, and help us work together with them more effectively.*

*This is my inner critic. Their name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Describe some of their features-i/e they have a magnifying glass because they closely examine everything, they have 7 eyes because they are always watching me, they have a journal where they record all my mistakes and remind me later, etc)*

*You are going to make a representation of your own inner critics. You can start by thinking about a time when your inner critic visited you (mistakes are a great place to look). Can you hear what your inner critic says? Can you imagine any of its features or physical attributes?*

*Your inner critic can look anyway. Be creative and have fun.*

3. **Communicate about materials, systems, and expectations.**
4. **Studio / independent creative timespace.**



5. **Clean up & transition.**

6. **Individual reflection** - this can begin during sculpting, then extend into more focused reflection time when students have finished engaging with materials. The handout guides this process.

*Now we will get to know our inner critics. We will do this by having a conversation with them. This might sound strange, but I personally have learned a lot from this!*

**Ask your inner critic**

What is your name?

What is a phrase you often use?

What is your purpose?

What do you want me to know about you?

How can we work better together? (make an agreement with them)

Students record their responses and are invited to make a 2-D sketch of the inner critic. Ask them to label the sketch with the significance of each feature.

7. **Share Out** - Here, students often find that they are in good company, that their own critical voice says similar things as their peers'. Below are some possible formats that support interaction. For all of them, consider the following:

- Revisit group agreements before entering into any of the sharing options.
- Set a playful tone.
- Make sure to allow enough time for closure afterward.

Pair-share\*

Introductions (lower risk) - students introduce their inner critic to their partner, including whatever they feel comfortable sharing from their reflection. Explain the materials choices they made and the significance of their inner critic's features.

Role play (advancing risk) - students speak to each other as if they were their critic. They can use the "conversation" between critics to play with voices and expand that character.

\*Either of these can be done in video format, but in-person peer sharing is recommended.

"Gallery walk"

Clear table surfaces except for each student's inner critic and reflection sheet, to achieve the feeling of a casual art gallery. This can easily be anonymous by folding over the top of the sheet.



Possible ways of interacting:

*I notice..., I appreciate..., I wonder...* - students respond to their classmates' work using sticky notes or a singular page at each desk.

Have students look for commonalities between critics - Possible prompts: *Find one that says something similar to what yours says. Find one that is drastically different from yours. Find one that used materials in a similar way to you. Find one that used materials in a way you never would have thought of yourself. Find one that...*

Small groups

Role-play: Introduce your inner critic to the others. Experiment with voices. Have a dialogue. Look for commonalities. Exaggerate characteristics. Play. If your inner critic made a gesture, what gesture would it make?

Work together to come up with a public service announcement that addresses one of the group's shared criticisms. Make it into a performance (skit, video, etc.). Imagine how one might work together with their critic. Consider "flipping the script" - how might talking back or introducing a virtue help to reframe the relationship? (see below)

8. **Transforming the Critic** - It is so important to bring closure to this process before sending students away from it. These are suggestions for ways to shift the conversation from a focus on self-criticism to personal empowerment and agency to work with these challenging parts of self.

**Debrief** (super important)

What was that like?

What commonalities did you see, across people's inner critics?

Any surprises?

What were some of your agreements?

How can we have a better relationship with our inner critic?

**How can this relationship with our inner critic help us become more healthy?**

**Depersonalize the inner critic.** Transition from 'my' inner critic to 'this' inner critic (can happen at any phase of the reflection process)

**Identify a virtue** - This can happen at various moments and in various ways. Consider working this into students' sculptures or simply discussing it as a possibility for transforming the critic. See "Virtues Creative Challenge" in the "Deepening" section.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My inner critic's name is \_\_\_\_\_.

My inner critic says (word or phrase) "\_\_\_\_\_."

Inner Critic, What is your purpose?

Inner Critic, What do you want me to know about you?

How can we work better together? (make an agreement with them)