

VAI EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

SEL Your Way Through the Curriculum



Pandemic teaching has left more than an academic mark on education. Socially, students are having to relearn how to interact with one another in a school setting. Emotionally, students have experienced perpetual uncertainty at best, and sustained trauma and loss at worst. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has always been integral to well-rounded student success, but perhaps never more so than now.

CASEL Framework

One of the leading authorities on SEL is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This organization has extensive resources for classroom use, including the [CASEL framework](#) which provides a foundation for applying evidence-based SEL strategies. The five competencies on the CASEL framework can be extremely helpful in ensuring your classroom is supporting the SEL needs of your students:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

Explore 8 SEL Lessons aligned to the 5 CASEL competencies.

8 SEL Lessons

1. Marshmallow Experiment

In this 1972 experiment at Stanford University, young children were offered a marshmallow. They could eat it right away, or they could wait 15 minutes for the proctor to return. If they waited, they would get two marshmallows. The study followed the students and found that the ones that could wait for the second marshmallow:

- Were rated as better students.
- Were more likely to have lots of friends.
- Were more likely to be in good physical shape.
- Scored better on school tests.
- Made more money.

(Note: Subsequent studies have shed some doubt on the long-term findings, but there's little argument that proficiency in delayed gratification is an important skill for any of us.)

How can you use this in your classroom?

- Recreate this experiment with your own students to highlight the difficulties of delayed gratification.
- Or have your students create an investigation plan to recreate the experiment with another classroom.

Then, explain ways to improve delayed gratification

- **Distraction:** When waiting for something to happen, distract yourself with engaging work that will take your mind off the thing you're waiting for.
- **Abstraction:** If you can't distract yourself, then change the way you think about the thing you're waiting for. Instead of thinking of how good that marshmallow would taste, ponder abstract questions about the marshmallow: *How many marshmallows would it take to fill this room? What song would a marshmallow like to sing?*
- **Gamification:** Treat the waiting time like milestones in a game. Cross off days in the calendar, create a tally mark sheet, color in squares on a path, or devise some other way to visually track progress through the waiting period.

Here is more information about the [original marshmallow experiment](#). And here is a video of a [more recent reenactment](#).

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making

2. Scout vs. Soldier

This mini-lesson helps students understand that different people have different perspectives and to think about their own mindset as they encounter different points of view. They learn not to defend their beliefs no matter what and shoot down other people's opinions, but rather to be driven by a desire to find the truth and to willingly change their mind when new information is learned.

- Use the slideshow [Agree to Disagree](#) to highlight how different people see different things in the same image.
- Then watch the TedTalk [Why you think you're right — even if you're wrong](#) (11:37) to learn about soldier vs. scout mindset. Encourage students to develop a scout mindset.
- Role play using the soldier and scout mindsets for a variety of topics. Consider starting with less controversial topics and working toward more controversial topics as you deem appropriate. For example:
 - Favorite ice cream flavor
 - Favorite sports team
 - School lunches
 - School uniforms
 - Banned books
 - Mask mandates
- Explain that to maintain a scout mindset, students should:
 - **Be curious:** Take a genuine interest in the world around them.
 - **Be open:** Be willing to change their mind when presented with new information.
 - **Be grounded:** Do not tie their self-worth to whether their idea is right or wrong.
- Share the [Soldier vs. Scout Mindset](#) poster to remind students to strive for a scout mindset.

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making

3. The Gardener's Son

Sometimes the best way to develop SEL with students is to present an ethically complicated scenario and hold a discussion. The scenario engages students emotionally and cognitively, and the discussion allows students to work on understanding social cues.

- Play the first 2:07 seconds of [A Short History of Humans and Germs](#) to learn about Jenner's testing of the first vaccine on his gardener's son. (Note: the second half of the video addresses how germs continue to evolve, but it was created before COVID-19, so feels a bit dated.)
- Engage students in a discussion about this controversial topic to develop their social awareness. Also discuss how we can use this story to make responsible decisions.
- Possible discussion questions include:
 - Was Jenner's decision morally right or not, and what standards might we use to judge this?
 - How might this dilemma be different today from in Jenner's time?
 - Would it have made a difference if it was his own son instead of the gardener's?
- As students discuss, help them improve their social awareness.
 - Understand and take note of non-verbal cues. Know when something you said has landed wrong and make adjustments.
 - Listen to understand, not to formulate your next argument.
 - In topics with gray areas, try to find elements of objectivity that can be used for sound decision making. For example, we now have ethical review boards that must approve new experiments, and we have animal testing protocols that must be followed before we start human testing.

CASEL Competencies: Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

4. Baboons' Dilemma

Simulation games are innately motivating, engage students' imaginations, and provide rich content for SEL development. Access the full mini lesson for [The Baboons' Dilemma](#) here.

- Show students [The Baboons' Dilemma video](#), or walk through the [Slideshow](#) with them.
- Model how to play five rounds of the game, then distribute the [Baboons' Dilemma Score Sheet](#) and allow students to pair up to play.
- Students will play five rounds with each partner and will play with a total of five partners, making 25 rounds all together.
- After students have finished, have them add up their scores and reveal the big secret: if they had cooperated every time, each student would have caught 75 fish.
- But in almost every classroom that has played this game, NO ONE catches 75 fish! Looking out for yourself doesn't just hurt the group — it hurts YOU!
- Discuss how life is filled with situations where it can be tempting to act selfishly — but that acting selfishly is often worse both for other people AND for you.

CASEL Competencies: Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making

5. STEAM Team

Get students collaborating through STEAM-based activities in the great outdoors. Check out [STEAM Team](#) for seven activities to make their outdoor experience outstanding! Each activity includes the materials list, criteria and constraints, and step-by-step directions.

CASEL Competencies: Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

6. Naturexplore Scavenger Hunt

[Naturexplore](#) is designed to spark curiosity and conversation. For each item on the scavenger hunt list, students log what was found, where, and a justification for how their choice fits. The point isn't whether students are right or wrong, it's the rich discussions about what they think and why! Encourage conversation about controversial or incorrect answers to develop self-awareness and relationship skills.

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

7. Peaceful Planters

Difficult times can help us grow. Bring that important SEL lesson to life—while learning science and exercising creativity—by having your students create a Peaceful Planter. Use interesting examples to spark your students’ imaginations, then have them create a [Peaceful Planter](#) garden your school can enjoy.

Explore concepts that connect the planters and SEL:

- Recycling and rejuvenation
- Steady growth
- What things need to grow
- Pride in appearance
- Time to take care of things

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making

8. I See You!

Student-to-student affirmations can be particularly powerful in building students’ self-awareness and confidence. This simple lesson requires very little supplies and can be done in 15 minutes.

- Have each student write their name on a blank piece of paper.
- Tape each paper along the walls of the room.
- Ask students to consider what they value in each of their classmates.
- Have students walk around the room, visiting each person’s paper, and writing what they value most about that person.
- Students should end back at their paper with the characteristics their classmates value most in them written on their page.
- Discuss how students feel about the activity.

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

8 SEL Lessons Aligned to the 5 CASEL competencies.

	Marshmallow Experiment	Scout vs. Soldier Mindset	The Gardener’s Son	Baboons’ Dilemma	STEAM Team	Naturexplore Scavenger Hunt	Peaceful Planters	I See You!
Self-Awareness	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Self-Management	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Social Awareness		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Relationship Skills			✓		✓	✓		✓
Responsible Decision-Making	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	

SEL and Blue Apple Projects

If you're looking to incorporate SEL into larger project-based learning units, [Blue Apple Projects](#) are perfect for SEL development. Each engages students in making the world a better place, and that sense of purpose is an ideal backdrop for building skills in each of the SEL competencies. Take a look and see if you want to incorporate these into your learning adventures next year.

For example, check out [Take a Stand](#). In this project, students take a stand on an issue that matters to them. Through respectful discourse, they construct and articulate well-researched positions and deliver them in the form of an inspirational podcast. Just imagine if all our students could make their voices heard and become the change makers our world needs!



If you'd like to try this project, check out these resources:

- This [Project Overview](#) provides a lesson by lesson summary of this project.
- Here is a [Recommended Book List](#) of rich, diverse literature on the topic of respectful discourse.
- Check out [K-8 content standard connections](#) for this project.
- To see this project in action, check out the [project video](#).

[Click here](#) if you would like to see a **FREE 30-minute webinar** of this content:
SEL Your Way to the Finish Line.

START PBL TODAY WITH BLUE APPLE PROJECTS!

Each Blue Apple Project Includes:

- Engaging lessons designed to make learning memorable, meaningful, and fun
- Curated online resources to save you time searching for content
- In-person, virtual, and hybrid options for all learning environments
- Cross-curricular mini-lessons in English-Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Social-Emotional Learning
- Videos and contact info provided by real-world experts willing to meet with your students
- Collaboration opportunities with other classrooms
- Free project supplies to get you started right away

For details, go to: www.blueappleteacher.org.



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