

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION PUZZLES

2 hands-on leadership activities + teacher-created book-cover puzzles

Grades 3–5 • Critical Thinking • Collaboration • Community Contribution

LOW PREP • FLEXIBLE BOOK CHOICES • CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

What's Included

This package preserves the original two-part lesson structure: students first solve a classwide puzzle challenge in which puzzle pieces have been mixed among groups, then examine how characters in literature contribute to their communities. The puzzle activity is designed for teachers to create their own puzzles from books they already own or have permission to use.

Challenge 1: The Book Cover Puzzle Exchange — teacher guide, book suggestions, setup directions, student challenge, and reflection.

Challenge 2: Characters Who Contribute — teacher guide, book-flexible character analysis organizer, group share mat, and exit ticket.

Teacher Support — learning targets, facilitation notes, differentiation, extensions, and TPT listing copy.

Copyright-Friendly Design Note

This resource does not reproduce book covers. Instead, it gives teachers a curated list of age-appropriate books they may already have in their classroom or school library. Teachers create the puzzle pieces themselves from a legally available copy of a cover image or from a photocopy/photo they are permitted to use in their own classroom.

Challenge 1: The Book Cover Puzzle Exchange

A collaborative problem-solving simulation in which each group begins with a book-cover puzzle — but several pieces secretly belong to other groups.

GRADE BAND	3–5
TIME	30–45 minutes
MATERIALS	6 different book-cover puzzles, envelopes or bags, scissors, reflection sheet
LEARNING TARGETS	I can use observation and critical thinking to solve a problem. I can communicate, negotiate, and collaborate so the whole class succeeds.
CLASS CHALLENGE	Finish all six book-cover puzzles as a class.

Set Up

Choose six different books from the list on the next pages, or substitute comparable books already in your classroom. Create one puzzle from each book cover. A simple 3×4 grid creates 12 pieces and works well for third grade. Print each cover at approximately 8×10 inches on cardstock, draw the grid on the back, and cut it apart.

Before class, secretly move 2–3 pieces from each puzzle into other groups' envelopes. Make sure every piece is still somewhere in the room. Do NOT tell students that pieces have been exchanged.

Activity

Divide the class into six groups and give each group one envelope. Tell students only: "Your challenge is to finish all of the puzzles as a class." Once students begin, resist explaining why pieces do not fit. Observe who becomes curious, who looks around the room, who asks other groups questions, and who recognizes that the class must exchange pieces in order for everyone to succeed.

As students discover the mixed pieces, watch for productive conflict. Groups often want to hold onto every piece in their envelope or race to finish first. Use the debrief to discuss how curiosity, communication, flexibility, and collaboration helped turn six separate problems into one shared problem.

Optional Barter Rule

To emphasize negotiation, tell students they may not take a puzzle piece from another group. They must communicate and reach an agreement before a piece changes hands. A trade does not have to be one-for-one; the goal is collaboration rather than teaching a formal economic barter system.

Suggested Books for the Puzzle Exchange

Choose six covers that are visually distinct from one another. The books do not need to be read before the puzzle activity; the cover simply becomes the puzzle image. These selections are appropriate for elementary classrooms and connect naturally to curiosity, problem solving, teamwork, inclusion, perseverance, or community.

BOOK	AUTHOR	WHY IT FITS
Ada Twist, Scientist	Andrea Beaty	Curiosity, questioning, problem solving
Rosie Revere, Engineer	Andrea Beaty	Perseverance, creativity, learning from failure
Iggly Peck, Architect	Andrea Beaty	Problem solving, using strengths to help others
Sofia Valdez, Future Prez	Andrea Beaty	Community action, advocacy, leadership
Aaron Slater, Illustrator	Andrea Beaty	Creativity, perseverance, communicating in different ways
The Most Magnificent Thing	Ashley Spires	Persistence, design thinking, managing frustration
What Do You Do With an Idea?	Kobi Yamada	Creativity, courage, developing ideas
What Do You Do With a Problem?	Kobi Yamada	Problem solving, resilience

Going Places	Peter H. Reynolds & Paul A. Reynolds	Creativity, collaboration, thinking differently
Say Something!	Peter H. Reynolds	Voice, advocacy, positive action
The Invisible Boy	Trudy Ludwig	Inclusion, empathy, noticing others
Those Shoes	Maribeth Boelts	Empathy, generosity, wants versus needs
Last Stop on Market Street	Matt de la Peña	Community, service, perspective
Each Kindness	Jacqueline Woodson	Kindness, choices, community impact
The Day You Begin	Jacqueline Woodson	Belonging, courage, connection
All Are Welcome	Alexandra Penfold	Belonging, inclusion, classroom community
Hey, Wall	Susan Verde	Community improvement, collaboration, art
One Plastic Bag	Miranda Paul	Environmental action, innovation, community leadership
Ada's Violin	Susan Hood	Creativity, resourcefulness, community transformation

City Green	DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan	Community action, cooperation, stewardship

Six Easy Ready-to-Choose Sets

Teachers can mix and match any six books. These sample sets make prep even faster.

Set A: Andrea Beaty Classroom Favorites

Ada Twist, Scientist

Rosie Revere, Engineer

Iggy Peck, Architect

Sofia Valdez, Future Prez

Aaron Slater, Illustrator

Choose another Questioners title or substitute a classroom favorite.

Set B: Problem Solvers & Makers

The Most Magnificent Thing

Ada Twist, Scientist

Rosie Revere, Engineer

Going Places

What Do You Do With an Idea?

What Do You Do With a Problem?

Set C: Community & Contribution

Last Stop on Market Street

Hey, Wall

City Green

One Plastic Bag

Ada's Violin

Sofia Valdez, Future Prez

Set D: Classroom Community & SEL

The Invisible Boy

Those Shoes

Each Kindness

The Day You Begin

All Are Welcome

Say Something!

Teacher Tip

If you want the discovery to happen quickly, choose covers with very different colors and illustration styles. If you want a harder challenge, choose books from the same series or with similar cover designs.

THE BOOK COVER PUZZLE EXCHANGE

YOUR CLASS CHALLENGE

Complete every book-cover puzzle in the room. Your group may move, observe, ask questions, offer help, and communicate with other groups. The class succeeds only when every puzzle is complete.

Study your pieces before you act.

If something does not fit, investigate.

Communicate respectfully with other groups.

Do not take pieces without permission.

Keep working until the whole class succeeds.

Reflection

1. What was the first clue that your group might not have all the right pieces?

2. What did your group do when a piece did not fit?

3. How did you figure out that another group might have one of your pieces?

4. Did any conflict or disagreement happen between groups? How was it handled?

5. When did you realize this was a class challenge rather than six separate group challenges?

6. How did curiosity help you solve the problem?

7. Which mattered most today: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, or persistence? Explain.

Challenge 2: Characters Who Contribute

After the puzzle challenge, use the same books — or a smaller selection — to move from collaboration as an experience to leadership and community contribution in literature.

Students read or revisit a teacher-selected text and look for a community need, the action a character takes, the leadership behavior shown, and the impact of that action.

Suggested Leadership Behaviors

Notices a need • asks questions • uses strengths • collaborates • communicates clearly • includes others • takes responsible action • persists • creates or improves something • advocates respectfully • reflects and adjusts

Activity

Place one text with each group. Students may choose one reader, take turns reading, or read independently and discuss. Groups identify how a character contributes to a community and prepare a 60–90 second share-out using the organizer.

Reflection

How might you make a positive change in a community you belong to?

CHARACTERS WHO CONTRIBUTE

Name(s): _____ Text: _____

What does the community need?

What does the character notice?

What action does the character take?

Who helps or collaborates?

What leadership behavior do you see?

What changes because of the action?

Evidence from the text

Our Claim

This character contributes to the community by _____

Group Share Mat

START WITH THE NEED: In our text, the community needed...

NAME THE ACTION: The character responded by...

PROVE IT: One detail that shows this is...

CONNECT TO LEADERSHIP: This shows _____ because...

EXPLAIN THE IMPACT: Because of this action...

MAKE IT TRANSFER: A person in our community could do something similar by...

Exit Ticket

What is one new way you saw a character contribute to a community today?

Which leadership behavior appeared in more than one text?

How might you make one positive change in a community you belong to?

Differentiation & Teacher Notes

Make It More Accessible

Use 9-piece puzzles instead of 12; choose highly distinctive covers; assign group roles such as Observer, Communicator, Organizer, and Encourager; use a familiar read-aloud for the character activity; allow sketches rather than full written responses.

Increase the Challenge

Use 16-piece puzzles; choose visually similar covers; give no directions beyond the class goal; require students to explain the reasoning behind an exchange; require two pieces of textual evidence during Characters Who Contribute.

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