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## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

# Creative Acts for Curious People

## Creating New, Playful Connections in a Group

Before you work with someone else, or ask students to work with each other in a creative way, it helps if everyone is comfortable with each other. You need to connect on a human level. This activity is all about quickly creating the conditions for collaboration—it's also a good reminder that playfulness opens us up.

For this activity, you are going to have to (1) stand up, (2) interact with each other, and (3) be silly. Everything about this is different from the way we're told to act in the classroom or the way we "normally" act as adults. By changing the inherent social contract between the people in the room you can accelerate the bonding process. You open up space for new norms to be created: ones that foster closer connection, trust, and vulnerability.

This activity was created by improviser and educator Dan Klein, and is available in a longer form in *Creative Acts for Curious People* by Sarah Stein Greenberg. It is an opportunity to model courage, energy, joy, or whatever the new norms are that you want to see in your classroom. It has been adapted for use in both K12 and higher education classrooms. Use this assignment to introduce new collaborators to each other for the first time or reignite an old group with a new spark.

# Activity: The Secret Handshake

## LEARNING GOAL

To help learners of any age connect with their peers and bond as a group.

## WHERE TO USE THIS ACTIVITY

Classrooms | Workshops

## MATERIALS

No materials needed

## FORMAT

Group work in a space that allows everyone to move around a little

## INSTRUCTIONS

First, imagine a shared scenario that happened in the past. Address the group to set the stage with something like: “Remember how, when you were at camp together, you and your best friends had a secret handshake?” Any fictional shared setting that conjures a little nostalgia works, like growing up in the same neighborhood or working the same job as teenagers. Adjust the setting to suit the group you are working with.

Next, explain to the group that you’re going to pair off and create a secret handshake. It helps to demonstrate an example or look one up online; professional soccer players are great inspiration. You just need a model of a goofy handshake to get going—the more elaborate the better. It’s important that you model the behavior you want the participants to show.

Invite the members of your group to pair up and create their own secret handshake that is unique to each pair. Give them one minute to make and practice their secret handshake with their partner to be sure they’ve got it down. If you have an odd number, a group of three works fine.

Then say, “Individually, go to different spots all over the room. Imagine that it’s been years since you’ve seen your partner. You are at a camp reunion (or any other appropriate location based on the initial premise), mingling around, and you see each other. As soon as you see your long-lost friend, break into the secret handshake.”

Pause, so they can migrate to different areas.

And then yell “Go!”

Everyone will start to slowly gravitate toward their partner. Then the whole group erupts into a physical movement that engulfs the room. At the end, you can ask a few pairs (or everyone, if you have time) to show off their secret handshakes.

A possible modification for an online environment: Put pairs in breakout rooms and have them come up with their handshakes; then select a few teams to demo theirs and teach them to everyone. Take some screenshots while everyone is mid-handshake for the group to enjoy and laugh together about later.

## WE'D LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK!



**This educators' guide is a prototype (hooray!).** We're hoping to understand what types of materials are useful to educators and learners in K12 and higher education classrooms. If you used this, please share your feedback with us in this four-question survey.

## WANT TO READ MORE?

**Check out *Creative Acts for Curious People!*** The book offers even more ways to nurture an inquisitive mind and the ability to act with intention.

Learn about all of our d.school books at [dschool.stanford.edu/books](https://dschool.stanford.edu/books).

To request a complimentary examination copy to review for use in your classroom, contact Penguin Random House Education at [k12education@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:k12education@penguinrandomhouse.com) for PreK–12 Education or [highereducation@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:highereducation@penguinrandomhouse.com) for Higher Education.