



Flexible Thinking

Materials:

- Worksheet
- Rubber bands (one for each student or pair of students)
- Timer

Brainstorm

LinkedIn recently asked the leaders of top corporations what skills students need to be successful in the workplace. What do you think some of those skills are?

Discuss

As student volunteers share their responses, clarify or confirm responses, including: Adaptive thinking, communication and collaboration skills, critical thinking and problem solving, and creativity and innovation. Continue to facilitate the class discussion as long as it remains productive and on topic, such as by asking for examples of when students have shown these skills in the classroom, at home, in the community, or at work.

Dive in!

As high school students, you'll learn a lot of information to help you become successful in life. But there are also a number of skills you'll need to be successful as well. Today we're going to talk about one of those skills: Flexible thinking. **Flexible thinking** is sometimes also called divergent or elastic thinking and it is the ability to adapt or adjust to new situations easily. But being able to adapt means more than just "going with the flow". It means being able to use logic, reasoning, and imagination to come up with new ideas in new situations. Let's look at an example. Most of you probably have a cell phone. And it's likely that your phone has many features built in, such as the ability to go online, to play music, and take pictures to name a few. But the first commonly used smart phone didn't come out until 2007. When that phone came out, other mobile phone companies had to show flexible thinking to be competitive. Some were not successful, and some went out of business. Others took a long time to create a competitive product. But all mobile phone companies have to continue to have flexible thinking and innovate in order to make improvements to their product and stay ahead of the competition. For example, in the last 14 years, Apple has released over 30 iterations of its popular iPhone!



High School

Activity

Distribute one copy of the Worksheet to each student and one rubber band (you can also do this activity with other common classroom objects if you prefer). Have students first work individually to see how many uses they can come up with for a rubber band in one minute. Then, have students work in pairs to do the same. Finally, instruct students to work in groups to see how many uses they can find in one minute. When done, have students share their ideas. Point out the variety of ideas they used when working individually, as a pair, and as a group as an example of flexible thinking. Possible uses for the rubber bands include: Hair scrunchies, bag clip, bracelet, keeping items together, keeping books closed, making a gripper for a jar lid, tie dye, eraser, etc. For other ideas, visit:

<https://expertthometips.com/incredibly-smart-uses-for-rubber-bands>.

Reflect

Have students respond to the prompts at the bottom of the worksheet: Which of the skills employers say students need to be successful are areas of strength for you? Which are areas you'd like to improve?

Extend and Enrich

Project based learning (PBL) activities often give students the opportunity to practice flexible thinking skills. The Bucks Institute for Education has free lesson plan ideas teachers can use to integrate PBL into their classroom. To find activities, visit: www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl.

For Further Study

- EdWeek: How do you Define 21st Century Learning?
www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/how-do-you-define-21st-century-learning/2010/10
- LinkedIn: *10 Skills Students Need to be Successful*:
www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/higher-education/10-skills-all-students-need-to-be-successful
- Scientific American: *The Power of Flexible Thinking*:
www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-power-of-flexible-thinking/

Professional Development

Are there ways you can integrate more flexible thinking activities into your classroom?