



Level 2: Limbic • Relationship •

Level 2 helps develop the limbic system which is the emotional center of the brain, responsible for how we feel, remember, and **relate to others**. This part of the brain plays a major role in how we form emotional bonds, experience empathy, and build trust. When we feel safe and connected, the limbic system supports healthy social interaction and attachment. It helps us read facial expressions, understand others' emotions, and respond with care—making it essential for developing strong relationships and a sense of belonging.

The arts support the limbic system by creating **safe spaces for emotional expression and human connection**. This kind of vulnerability fosters empathy and deepens emotional understanding between people. Collaborative art-making helps build trust, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. These shared creative experiences activate the limbic system in ways that strengthen relationships and emotional integrity, allowing people to feel seen, heard, and connected.

Use Level 2 in order to:

- Develop connections between peers
- Explore emotions and experience empathy
- Demonstrate trust amongst others and within themselves



Human Machine Ensemble

Age Range: 8+

Type of Art: Drama / Dance

Goals:

- To foster creative problem-solving and teamwork through *relational* and *repetitive* collaboration
- To strengthen non-verbal communication through *rhythmic* and *relevant* embodied storytelling
- To build trust and shared focus through *respectful* physical interaction
- To create a *rewarding* group experience through playful, performative invention

Materials:

- Open space for movement
- (Optional) Music or rhythmic sound source (drum beat, metronome, etc.)
- (Optional) Simple props (e.g., scarves, cardboard tubes, costume pieces)

Directions:

1. Introduction to Machines

- Briefly discuss machines with students: What do machines do? How do they move or sound?
- Show examples or mimic mechanical actions together.

2. Machine Movement Warm-Up

- Lead a guided movement session where students practice isolated, repetitive actions (e.g., pistons, conveyor belts, gears).
- Add sounds to match movements.

3. Individual Machine Creation

- Each student invents their own unique “machine part” with:
 - A repeating movement
 - A characteristic sound
 - A clear way to start and stop

4. Forming a Collective Machine

- Divide into small groups (3–6 students).
- Each group links their individual machines together using non-verbal communication (visual cues, spatial awareness, sound timing).
- Encourage students to experiment with how their movements fit together—like gears or levers—into a working system.

5. Machine Performance

- Each group activates their human machine.
- Run the machine for 15–30 seconds and then power it down together.
- Encourage dramatic, rhythmic synchronization and exaggerated expressions.

6. Reflection and Discussion (5–10 min)

Use prompts like:

- What was challenging about building the machine together?
- How did you know when to start or stop your movement?
- What was your machine's purpose?
- What did it feel like to work as one system?

Adaptation:

Work as a whole class. One student goes to the playing space and makes a sound and movement. The class observes and another student goes up to add on to the previous student and so on. You can have some students sit out to observe. “What was the machine making?” “What sounds did you hear?” “How did they work together?”



Mindful Photography

Type of Art: Visual Art

Age Range: 12+

Goals:

- To strengthen emotional awareness and self-expression through *relevant* and *rewarding* personal exploration
- To offer a *respectful*, trauma-sensitive alternative to unhealthy coping behaviors
- To reduce stress and anxiety through *rhythmic* sensory regulation (walking, breathing, focus)
- To build confidence and creative voice through *relational* reflection and optional sharing

Materials:

- Film or digital camera / phone with camera
- Notebook or journal
- (Optional) Headphones, calming music

Directions:

1. Set an Intention (5–10 min)

- Begin with a grounding activity: deep breathing, stretching, or quiet observation.
- Ask students to place one hand on their heart or belly and notice how they're feeling.
- Offer reflection prompts:
 - “*What do you want to notice today?*”
 - “*What emotion are you feeling right now?*”
- Introduce a theme for the walk, such as:
 - “*Peace*”
 - “*Light and shadow*”
 - “*Stillness*”
 - “*Things that bring you joy*”

2. Walk and Observe (15–30 min)

- Invite students to take a mindful walk—either outside or around the school.
- Encourage slowness and sensory awareness:
 - “*Notice what you see, hear, smell, or feel.*”
- Students take photos based on the intention or theme. Remind them:
 - It's not about *taking a lot*, but *looking deeply*.

3. Reflect and Respond (10–15 min)

- Have students choose 1–3 favorite photos.
- Journal responses to any of the following:
 - What drew you to take this photo?
 - What emotion does it represent?
 - What does this photo say about how your day is going?
 - Did anything surprise you during this walk?

Optional: Students can share their photos and reflections in pairs or as a gallery wall.



Partner Mirror Movement

Age Range: 5+

Type of Art: Drama / Dance

Goals:

- To promote *regulation* by encouraging focused attention and calm, deliberate movement.
- To foster *relationships* through active, cooperative interaction and building trust and respect between partners.
- To build *impulse control* by practicing controlled and intentional movements.

Materials:

- Open space large enough for pairs to move comfortably without colliding

Directions:

1. **Introduction:** Explain that the goal is to work with a partner to create a “mirror” image by copying each other’s movements as precisely and slowly as possible, as if one is the reflection of the other in a mirror.
2. **Pair Up:** Have students find a partner and stand facing each other about an arm’s length apart.
3. **Decide Roles:** Assign one student as the “leader” and the other as the “mirror.” The leader will initiate slow, simple movements while the mirror copies exactly, matching timing, expression, and movement quality.
4. **Start Mirroring:**
 - The leader moves one body part at a time (e.g., raising a hand, tilting the head, stepping sideways) with slow, controlled motions.
 - The mirror carefully observes and copies the movements as if reflected in a mirror.
 - Encourage calm, steady breathing and focus to support regulation and attention.
5. **Switch Roles:** After a few minutes, pause and have the partners switch roles so both get a chance to lead and mirror.
6. **Increase Complexity:** As students become comfortable, encourage more complex movements involving the whole body, facial expressions, and changes in levels (high, medium, low).
7. **Group Reflection:** Bring the group together to share experiences and feelings about the activity. Ask questions like:
 - “How did it feel to follow your partner so closely?”
 - “What did you notice about your own movements when mirroring?”
 - “How did working with a partner help you focus or calm down?”

Extension:

- Try a “group mirror” where a small group follows the movements of one leader simultaneously. This encourages collective focus and synchrony.
- Add music with a slow tempo and encourage students to mirror movements in rhythm with the music.
- Incorporate props (scarves, hats) that move with the participants, increasing complexity and attention to detail.

Adaptations:

- For younger or less coordinated students, keep movements simple and slow.
- Encourage non-verbal communication and gentle encouragement between partners.
- For older students, challenge them with faster or more abstract movements to build impulse control and observational skills.
- Use this activity as a calming or focusing exercise before more active drama work.



Partner Mirror Drawing

Age Range: 6+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To build *relationships* and *respect* by encouraging close attention, cooperation, and mutual responsiveness between partners.
- To support *regulation* by engaging in slow, intentional movement that calms the nervous system.
- To keep the activity *relevant* by making space for student choice in imagery and mark-making.

Materials:

- Large paper (butcher paper or taped-together sheets)
- Markers, crayons, or oil pastels (two per pair, ideally same color)
- Flat surface (floor or table)
- Optional: calming background music

Directions:

1. **Setup:**
 - Tape a large sheet of paper to a table or the floor.
 - Partners sit or kneel across from one another, each holding a drawing utensil.
 - Draw a light vertical line down the center to divide the paper into mirrored halves.
2. **Explain the Concept:**
 - One partner will be the “leader” and begin slowly drawing shapes, lines, or images on their half of the paper.
 - The other partner will act as the “mirror,” copying the movement as precisely as possible on their side, as if reflecting it.
 - Emphasize slow, smooth movements and deep focus.
3. **Begin Drawing:**
 - Start with simple lines or shapes.
 - Encourage partners to maintain soft eye contact and adjust in real time, just like a moving mirror.
 - After a few minutes, invite them to switch roles.

4. Expand the Drawing:

- Allow both students to draw simultaneously—each becoming both leader and mirror, co-creating without one dominant voice.
- Encourage use of color, rhythm in line-making, and imaginative additions.

5. Reflect:

- Invite partners to describe what it felt like to mirror each other.
- Ask: “How did you know what your partner was going to do?” “What surprised you?” “Did your drawing feel connected?”
- Optionally, display the mirrored artwork to celebrate shared effort and focus.

Extension:

- Play slow, calming music to enhance rhythm and regulate pacing.
- Use non-dominant hands for a brain challenge and sensory reset.
- Turn the drawing into a story or scene afterward, encouraging expressive writing or performance based on the image.

Adaptations:

- For younger students, start with finger tracing in the air or on the paper before introducing drawing tools.
- For teens, invite abstract pattern-making, symmetry exploration, or personal symbolism to deepen engagement.
- Use this as a centering activity before transitions or after emotionally charged experiences.



Soundtrack to My Life

Type of Art: Music / Creative Writing

Age Range: 12+

Goals:

- To support emotional expression and self-awareness through *relevant* music-based reflection.
- To foster identity development and storytelling through *rewarding* and *relational* sharing opportunities.
- To provide a *respectful* outlet for personal truth and connection.
- To strengthen pattern recognition and emotional regulation through *rhythmic* listening.

Materials:

- Paper or printable worksheet
- Pens, markers
- Access to music (Spotify, YouTube, etc.)
- Headphones

Directions:

1. Introduce the Concept (5–10 min)

- Ask: *“If your life had a soundtrack, what songs would be on it?”*
- Discuss how music is tied to memory, emotion, and identity.
- Share an example (e.g., *“This song reminds me of my childhood summers.”*)

2. Create the Soundtrack (15–20 min)

- Have students list 5–7 songs that reflect:
 - A childhood memory
 - A song that calms them
 - A hype/energizing song
 - A song that makes them feel understood
 - A song that connects them to someone they love
 - A song that represents who they are today
- Encourage them to sketch “cover art” that visually represents their playlist.

3. Reflection Writing (optional)

- Why did you choose these songs?
- How do these songs tell a story about you?
- Did you notice any patterns or themes?

4. (Optional) Sharing:

- Students may share 1–2 song choices and what they mean to them.
- You can also create a class playlist of favorite tracks.



Name and Cross Circle / Toss-a-Name

Type of Art: Drama

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To build relationships and group cohesion through *relational* and *respectful* name recognition games
- To develop focus and self-regulation through *rhythmic* and *repetitive* movement and sequencing
- To create a playful, *rewarding* entry point to social connection and classroom culture
- To support memory and cognitive development through pattern-based activities

Materials:

- Open space
- (For variation) Soft tossable object

Directions:

1. Name & Cross Circle:
 - Students form a standing circle.
 - Person A says someone's name across the circle (Person B) and walks toward them.
 - Before Person A reaches them, Person B must say another person's name and start walking.
 - This continues, creating a chain reaction of name-calling and crossing.
 - Increase challenge: add multiple crossings at once or introduce movement styles.
2. Toss-a-Name Variation:
 - Let students know they are going to create a pattern.
 - Students sit or stand in a circle.
 - Person A tosses a soft object while saying Person B's name.
 - Person B replies "Thank you, [A]" and tosses to someone new.
 - Continue until all names are used. Tip: When someone's name is used, have them sit down so that they are not chosen again.
 - Once all names have been used, have the group stand up and see if they can remember who they threw the object to and who they received it from.
 - Do the pattern again without people sitting and just keeping the pattern going.
 - Add challenge: use multiple objects, create a memorized pattern, or change the order.



Poison Rhythm

Type of Art: Music / Dance

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To enhance listening and rhythmic memory through *repetitive* and *rhythmic* practice.
- To strengthen attention and inhibitory control in a *rewarding*, game-like format.
- Build group connection through shared focus and *relational* musical play.
- Promote sensory regulation through structured beat-based interaction.

Materials:

- Open space or desks
- Clapping hands or simple instruments
- Metronome (optional)
- Visual cue card (optional) for "poison rhythm"

Directions:

1. Introduce the Concept

- *"I'm going to teach you a rhythm that you must NOT repeat. This is the 'poison rhythm.'"*
- Demonstrate the rhythm with claps, stomps, or sounds. Repeat it several times and have students practice it until students recognize it.

2. Rhythm Echo Game

- Call-and-response: You (or students) clap rhythms for the group to echo.
- If someone echoes the poison rhythm, they're "out" or the round restarts.
- Continue until students can consistently avoid it.

3. Student-Led Version

- Students take turns being the leader.
- Each leader creates new rhythms or tries to trick classmates with the poison rhythm.

Optional Challenge: Add a beat or background music to increase focus.



Speed Meeting / Concentric Circles

Type of Art: Drama

Age Range: 8+

Goals:

- To build interpersonal connection through *relational* and *respectful* communication.
- To encourage vulnerability and self-expression through *rewarding* peer-to-peer exchanges.
- To promote empathy and active listening through *repetitive* practice with multiple partners.

Materials:

- Open space

Directions:

1. Set Up

- Form two circles: an inner circle facing out and an outer circle facing in.
- Each person has a partner directly across from them.

2. Ask Questions

- Ask a question like:
 - “What’s your favorite song right now?”
 - “What’s something you’re proud of?”
 - “What’s a goal you have this year?”
- Give 2–3 minutes for each pair to talk.
- After each round, the outer circle rotates one spot to the right, meeting a new partner.

3. Group Debrief (5 min)

- Ask:
 - What did you learn about others?
 - Did you find anything in common?
 - How did it feel to talk and be listened to?