

Thinking On My Own Video: Breaking the Ice

In order to continue preparing for the move to the new school, Sarah spent time practicing good conversational skills with her mom. While role-playing, she attempted to ask open-ended and “wh” questions in order to make connections with the other person, and to try to find out what they had in common. Sarah knew, from listening to her teacher, that these types of questions are better because they don’t just require yes or no answers.

Sarah also spent time going online to her new school’s website. This allowed Sarah to learn a lot of background information such as the different activities they offer. Sarah hopes that by doing this research she will be better prepared to talk to others when she gets to school for the first time.

Here are two examples of the role-playing conversations that Sarah practiced with her mom. Sarah believed the first example was a negative conversation and the second one much more positive. Check them out to find out why:

Negative Example:

Sarah – Hi, my name is Sarah. What is your name?

Maria – I am Maria. Are you a new student?

Sarah – Yes.

Maria – Did you just move here?

Sarah – Yes.

Maria – Have you gotten involved in any activities?

Sarah – No. Do you do activities?

Maria – I am in two groups.

Sarah – I see.

After talking with her mom, Sarah came to see that this conversation did not offer much information, so it was hard to build a strong conversation. Sarah understood that without asking open-ended questions, it would be hard for both people to maintain a conversation very long. This would not allow Sarah to find out what she had in common with “Maria” or what they both could learn from each other. To correct this situation, Sarah and her mom tried again. This time, Sarah used many more open questions in order to build on the information she learned as the conversation developed.

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Positive Example:

Sarah – Hi, my name is Sarah, and I think that we are in the same science class.

Maria – Yes, you're right. I'm Maria.

Sarah – I'm new here. How about you? How long have you gone to school here?

Maria – I've been here for two years. My family and I moved here from Camp Butler in Okinawa, Japan.

Sarah – That's cool. We moved here when my dad was transferred from Camp Pendleton in San Diego.

What advice do you have for a new kid?

Maria – Well, this is a great school. I would suggest getting involved in an activity to get to know people.

What types of things did you like to do in your old school?

Sarah – At my old school, I was a member of the debate team, and I also ran cross-country. What activities do you do?

Maria – I also run cross-country, and I am a part of a mentoring group that works with younger students.

Sarah – Wow! Could you tell me about what the cross-country team is like? I wonder how it compares to my team in San Diego.

Maria – Sure...

Now it's your turn:

Over the next week, watch a talk show or news program on television. Listen to the types of questions that are asked in interviews or news stories. Think about the positive strategies that the host is trying to use in order to move the conversation forward.

Also, when you are reading, pay attention to strong examples of good dialogue and conversations between characters. Think about how these conversations help you learn about the characters in your books.