



River of Life

This activity allows members of a learning community to get to know each other quickly while focusing on a powerful question that is at the center of their learning journey. Starting an inquiry by rooting a question in members' autobiographies can be a powerful experience.

- Our lives are like rivers.
- Each of our rivers has a different shape depending on our personal experiences and our cultural backgrounds.
- Each of us has had moments when our lives have turned and shifted direction, where there have been bends in our river.
- Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are driven by questions we have about the world and ourselves.
- As community-minded people and place-based educators, we think a lot about the following question—sometimes explicitly, and sometimes subconsciously:

What bring you to this place? To the SEMIS Coalition? To this community (where community includes humans as well as the water, the land, the plants, and the animals)?

- Write this question at the top of a page in your journal.
 - Identify 2-4 significant events/times in your life that have led you to become connected to this community. Draw a picture of a river, writing each of these events at a bend in the river. How has your river of life lead you to this community? What life experiences are at the river's source? What bends in the river have you experienced?
 - Since you will share your rivers with others, don't feel pressured to put anything on there that you do not want to share with others.
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Instructions:

- The facilitator briefly models the activity.
- Each participant takes 5 minutes to reflect and draw their river of life in their journals.
- In groups of 3 and over lunch share your river with people who you do not know well, with each person taking 5 minutes, and the other two people listening without interrupting.

A variation when you have an hour to do this activity:

- The facilitator models with her/his own river. This is an important step in establishing a safe and trusting atmosphere and will allow participants to open up and share honestly with others.
- Participants get into groups of 4, preferably with folks they do not know well.
- Each participant takes 5-10 minutes to reflect and draw their river of life. (Depending on your time constraints you participants may identify more than 4 events)
- Each participant takes 10 minutes to share their river with group members. Group members listen. If the participant takes less than 10 minutes, members of the group are responsible for asking questions to help the presenter elaborate.
- When everyone is finished, the group has an open discussion about themes they noticed, as well as similarities and differences in members' experiences and thinking. (5 minutes)
- Quick Debrief [5 minutes] Everyone gathers together and the facilitator asks the questions: What did you like or notice through the activity? What was a challenge? What could be changed to make the activity better when using it with your own students or in other contexts?