

3.9.2 Snowball in action

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

The snowball technique is a structured, cumulative peer-learning activity that builds understanding and consensus step by step: individuals first generate ideas alone, then merge them in progressively larger teams, and finally bring the consolidated thinking to the whole class. Each stage “rolls up” prior contributions like a snowball, refining and expanding them through dialogue. It encourages collaboration, active listening, participation, valuing others’ ideas, and critical thinking, making it a powerful tool for exploring complex ideas.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Valuing People and Nature
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Connectedness

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	Whole class (individual → pairs → groups of 4 → whole class)	30-45 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

Step 1 – Teacher prepares a “prompt”: The teacher prepares a central, open-ended prompt related to any topic of any lesson. The classroom space (physical or virtual) is organized so students can work individually, then in progressively larger groups (pairs → small groups → whole class). Provide each student/group with a response sheet or digital slide to record and “roll up” ideas.

Instructions to give students: “Today we’re using the Snowball to explore how we can value both people and nature. First, you’ll think on your own and write down your idea(s). Then you’ll pair up, share and combine your ideas, and keep doing that—rolling them together like a snowball—until the whole class has one richer set of ideas. At each stage, listen for how your ideas connect people and the planet, and be ready to explain why what you suggest shows respect and care for both.”

Running the activity – step-by-step at each stage:

Step 2 – Individual idea generation (2–3 minutes): Each student responds privately to the prompt. Students can write or draw.

Step 3 – Pair merging (4–5 minutes): Students work in pairs. They share their individual ideas and merge them into one improved response. They record the merged idea on a pair sheet. The basic rule is to always listen and understand what the other person is saying and thinking.

Step 4 – Small group consolidation (5–7 minutes): Two pairs join to form a group of 4 (or a suitable size). Each pair shares their merged response. The group discusses and creates one stronger consolidated idea.

Step 5 – Whole-class synthesis (8–12 minutes): Each group shares their consolidated idea. The teacher facilitates a collective map on the board. The class identifies common themes, highlights balanced ideas, and selects 1–2 actions to try as a class.

Optional extension – Commitment/Action planning (3–5 minutes): Students choose one small action and write a pledge:

“I will... because it helps people by... and helps nature by...”.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor: Students begin individually at desks, then form pairs, then groups of 4. Whole-class sharing happens in a circle/carpet area with a visible board for mapping ideas.

Outdoor (optional): Students can complete the individual and pair stages outdoors (clipboards), then return indoors for group consolidation and whole-class synthesis.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

As ideas “snowball,” students refine their thinking through dialogue and learn how communities build shared decisions that can honour people. This activity develops Valuing People & Nature because the structure repeatedly requires students to:

- Exposure to another perspective prompts re-evaluation and enrichment; articulating the rationale reinforces understanding of the dual value and begins social negotiation of shared values.
- Providing low-risk socialisation. For 6-year-olds, getting into a class-wide debate can be scary, which can lead to them feeling isolated if they are too shy to speak up. The snowball method creates a safe, risk-free learning environment (no need to respond immediately and no need to talk in front of everyone) in which each child feels seen and heard by at least one peer, which lays the foundation for connection.
- Encourages deeper collaboration, recognition of diverse viewpoints, and consensus-building around sustainable, equitable solutions—strengthening both conceptual and procedural dimensions.
- Public sharing and seeing the network of ideas highlight interconnectedness at scale, builds a sense of collective responsibility, and models how community-level decisions can honour member of the community.
- The ideas of the group growth, students must listen to each other. It organically trains 6- to 10-year-olds to stop talking and focus on their peers.
- It requires everyone to start with their own idea, and then requires pairs to merge those ideas, every single child's initial thought becomes part of the final, larger discussion. They learn that every person's input is a necessary building block.
- It teaches respect for other people's opinions, ideas and values, and that together we are more than alone.
- Respecting and dealing with differences: as the "snowball" gets bigger, students will necessarily meet ideas that are different from their own. Since the goal is synthesis rather than argument, children will learn how to appreciate a different point of view and figure out how it fits alongside their own, rather than simply rejecting it.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will be able to:

- understand that people are connected and influence each other
- recognise that the views and ideas of others are valuable even if they are different
- listen respectfully, appreciate others' contributions, and co-build ideas
- practise responsibility by making a personal or class commitment
- be able to make compromises to reach a common view.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

Use Snowball after a lesson, story, experiment, local observation, or discussion about a real-world theme.

General curriculum connection examples:

- Science: Students start by drawing or writing one thing they know about animals or plants, then combine ideas in pairs and small groups to build a class chart showing how living things grow, change, or need care.
- Math: Learners each solve a simple math puzzle (like showing ways to make 10), then share strategies in pairs, small groups, and finally compare all approaches on the board to explore different ways of thinking.
- Language Arts: Children brainstorm describing words for a character or setting on their own, then merge lists in growing groups to create rich, detailed word banks for writing a group story.
- History/Social Studies: Students begin by drawing or describing a rule they think is fair, then combine ideas in teams to make a "Classroom Bill of Rights," discussing fairness and working together.
- Environmental Studies/Geography: Each student shares one way to help the planet (e.g., recycle, save water), then snowball their ideas in groups to build a poster of class eco-actions for the school or community.

Examples for environment science/valuing nature theme:

Suggestion for central prompts:

- Water issue: "How can we use water fairly at school while also protecting nature?"
- Waste issue: "What can we change in our class so less waste is made, and everyone can take part?"
- Biodiversity issue: "How can we care for the schoolyard so students and insects/plants both benefit?"
- Community spaces: "How can we keep shared spaces welcoming for people and healthy for nature?" or "How can we create a community garden that nourishes both the environment and the people who use it?"

Practical progression of scenarios:

- **Stage 1 (Individual):** A student thinks of one idea, e.g., “Start a swap shelf so families can share resources instead of buying new things,” noting that it reduces waste and supports community equity.
- **Stage 2 (Pair):** Two students combine ideas: “Create a shared tool library and host monthly ‘care for garden’ days where volunteers teach others—this saves materials and builds community connections.”
- **Stage 3 (Small group):** Groups integrate multiple pair ideas into a broader initiative: “Launch a ‘Green & Good’ campaign where students gather usable items, redistribute them fairly, and plant native species that provide both ecological benefits and community spaces.”
- **Stage 4 (Whole class):** Class selects one action (e.g., a school-wide seed-and-swap event) and outlines how it values people (accessibility, participation) and nature (native planting, reuse).

Materials and tools needed for implementation

Minimal starter bundle

- Sticky notes or index cards + pens
- Prompt question
- Large paper for merging
- Timer
- Simple reflection slip

Individual idea generation

- Small papers/index cards or sticky notes
- Pens/pencils
- Prompt sheet (question or issue to respond to)

Pair/group merging phases

- Larger paper (A3/chart paper) or shared space to combine ideas
- Coloured markers for grouping/connecting
- Adhesive (tape/stickers) or means to “roll up” prior notes
- Merge templates (e.g., “Combined Ideas” sheet)

Whole-class consolidation

- Poster paper or digital collaborative board (Jamboard/Miro/etc.) (optional)
- Display area (wall, board) for the evolving “snowball”
- Voting dots/stickers or highlighting tools to surface key themes

Facilitation and pacing

- Timer/stopwatch (for each stage)
- Instructions/phase cue cards
- Norms reminder (e.g., respectful listening, building on others)

Reflection and feedback

- Quick reflection prompt cards or slips
- Peer-feedback notes

Guiding questions

Stage 1: individual work

- What is the absolute best idea that pops into your brain right now?
- If you could only pick one thing to draw/write, what would it be?

Stage 2: in pairs

- Who wants to share their snowflake first? Decide who is Partner A and Partner B.
- How are your two ideas the same? How are they different?
- Can you mash your two ideas together to make one new, bigger idea?
- If you have to pick just one idea to share with the next group, which one do you both agree on?

Stage 3: working in fours

- Pairs, take turns introducing your best idea to the new pair. Who will be the brave speaker for your pair?
- Did any pair bring the exact same idea to the group?
- What is the most surprising thing you just heard from the other pair?
- Now that you have four brains working together, what are the top two ideas you want to keep?

Stage 4: Whole Class

- Which group wants to share an idea that everyone in their group agreed on?
- Did anyone change their mind today because they heard a great idea from a friend?
- Look at all these ideas on the board! How did working together make our ideas better than when we were just single snowflakes?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Students do not understand the process
Tip: Explain the process by a physical metaphor they understand. "Right now, you are each a single, quiet snowflake. But soon, we are going to roll our ideas together to make a giant snowman!"
- **Challenge:** Students struggle to generate the first idea.
Tip: Give only a little time (1-2 minutes) and ask for something very specific and simple. Ask them to write down a single word or draw a quick picture so that they have something tangible to talk about.
- **Challenge:** Students struggle to merge ideas and agree.
Tip: Require "one idea from each person" before choosing what to combine. Use simple roles (speaker/recorder).
- **Challenge:** Students struggle to listen each other.
Tip: Ask them to sit "knee-to-knee and eye-to-eye." This physical cue helps little ones focus on active listening.

- **Challenge:** A group of four may be too big for the little ones (especially 6–7-year-olds) and they may not be able to concentrate on the task.
Tip: Give them a very clear task as soon as they sit down. And use the guiding questions from the previous point
- **Challenge:** Actions are too big or unrealistic.
Tip: Add a “Doable this week?” check and offer a small-action menu.
- **Challenge:** Students repeat ideas without improving them.
Tip: Require one upgrade at every stage (add fairness, include a missing perspective, or make the action more practical).

Difficulty level tailoring

Teachers can tailor the Snowball Technique to three difficulty levels to develop Connectedness and Valuing People and Nature.

- **Beginner learner (6-7 years old):** At Level 1 (Foundational), use very concrete, familiar examples (e.g., sharing school garden produce or reducing snack waste) and keep the progression simple (individual → pair → whole class); provide strong scaffolds like teacher modelling, sentence stems, and visuals linking people and nature, and assign clear roles so every child can contribute safely.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** At this level 2, introduce relatable but broader scenarios (e.g., cleaning the playground while protecting wildlife), run the full snowball (individual → pair → small group → whole class), require pairs to name the “bridge” between human and environmental benefits, use two-column merge sheets and guiding questions, and prompt groups to tweak ideas to be more inclusive.
- **Expert learners (9–10 years old):** At the expert learners’ level, surface mild trade-offs (e.g., building a path versus preserving plants), expect students to compare or defend integrated ideas, include concrete mini-actions and structured peer feedback, and give learners more autonomy in selecting, refining, and balancing solutions while reflecting on how they honoured both people’s needs and nature’.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

1. Reflection on Valuing People:
 - How did your ideas change or evolve throughout the activity?
 - Did any new perspectives emerge as you worked with others?
 - How did those perspectives challenge or reinforce your own ideas?
2. On Collaboration and Group Work:
 - How did collaborating with others help you refine your ideas?
 - What challenges did you face when working in pairs or groups, and how did you overcome them?
 - What benefits do you see in discussing complex topics with others, as opposed to reflecting alone?

3. General

- What did you notice changed about your idea as it rolled from individual to whole class?
- Was there a time when your group left out a voice or assumption?
- Did anyone change their mind today because they heard a great idea from a friend?
- Look at all these ideas on the board! How did working together make our ideas better than when we were just single snowflakes?

