



Back to school signals a new chapter, fresh goals, and another year of growth and discovery.

This August, we're kicking things off with a time capsule of your own.

In these activities, you'll take stock of who you are right now, including your values, interests, and aspirations for the year ahead. You'll set intentional goals, explore techniques for managing stress, and create a time capsule to reopen at the end of the school year. Get ready to look back and reflect on your growth, both personally and academically.

This packet includes...

- "Time Capsules" Reading Activity
- "Create Your Own Time Capsule" Activity
- "Pieces of Me" Activity
- "Letter to My Future Self" Writing Activity
- "Self Portrait" Creative Activity
- "Solve a Back-to-School Joke" Activity
- "Build Your Calm Kit" Creative Activity
- "Motto Cube" Activity
- "Back-to-School Word Search" Activity
- "Math About Me" Activity

Explore More

Extend your reflection with these activities that explore the people, memories, and experiences that have helped shaped your identity.



Partner with a family member to curate a family time capsule containing photographs, letters, and keepsakes that authentically represent this period of your life. Select a future date to revisit the capsule, and consider what you hope will have changed or remained constant by then.



Conduct an interview with an older relative or family friend about their experiences at your current age, focusing on priorities, challenges, and long-term goals at the time. Compare their perspective to your own, and consider how generational or cultural context may have shaped their outlook differently than yours.



Examine your personal development by reviewing childhood photos or discussing your early preferences and personality with a family member. Identify patterns of change and continuity in your identity over time, and reflect on experiences or influences that may have shaped that growth.



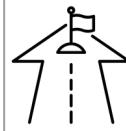
Directions: Read about time capsules, then design and fill your own using the template and planning table on the following pages!

Time Capsule Basics



What Is a Time Capsule?

A time capsule is a container sealed with objects, documents, or messages, then set aside to be opened at a specific point in the future. People create them to preserve a record of daily life, values, and events for whoever opens them later, sometimes decades or even centuries down the line.



Why Make One?

Time capsules let us communicate directly with the future. They capture a snapshot of a specific moment, preserving details that might otherwise be forgotten, and give later generations (including our future selves) a chance to reflect on how much has changed.

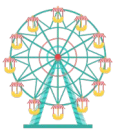
Spotlight: America's Time Capsule



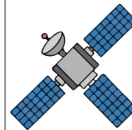
"NIST-A250-Time-Capsule-003," National Institute of Standards and Technology, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NIST-A250-Time-Capsule-003.jpg>

On July 4, 2026, a new time capsule was sealed to mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Unlike a typical box, it's built as a precision-milled stainless steel cylinder. It was engineered with help from the National Institute of Standards and Technology and preservation specialists at the Library of Congress, and it was designed to withstand two and a half centuries underground. It holds contributions from all three branches of the federal government, all 50 states and six territories, and everyday citizens, meant to capture what American life looked like at 250 years. The capsule was buried at Independence National Historical Park and won't be opened until 2276, in time for the nation's 500th anniversary.

Fun Facts About Time Capsules!



The term "time capsule" was coined for the 1939 **New York World's Fair**. A Westinghouse publicist first considered calling it a "time bomb" but changed the name to avoid the association with warfare.



Not every time capsule stays on Earth. Identical golden records were attached to **NASA's Voyager 1 and 2 space probes**, carrying sounds and images of life on Earth into deep space for any future finders.



Directions:

1. Choose a sealable container, such as a Pringles can, a jar, or a shoebox.
2. Color or decorate your template. Make sure to include a “Open On” date.
3. Glue or tape the template onto your capsule. You might wrap it around the capsule or put it on the lid.
4. Decide what to put inside using the planning table below. Avoid food, since it can spoil over time.
5. Place your items inside the container.
6. Seal your capsule (tape the lid, close the jar, or close the box) and store it somewhere safe until it’s time to open it.

Planning Table:

Fill in one item per category, with a short phrase (not a sentence) for your reasoning.

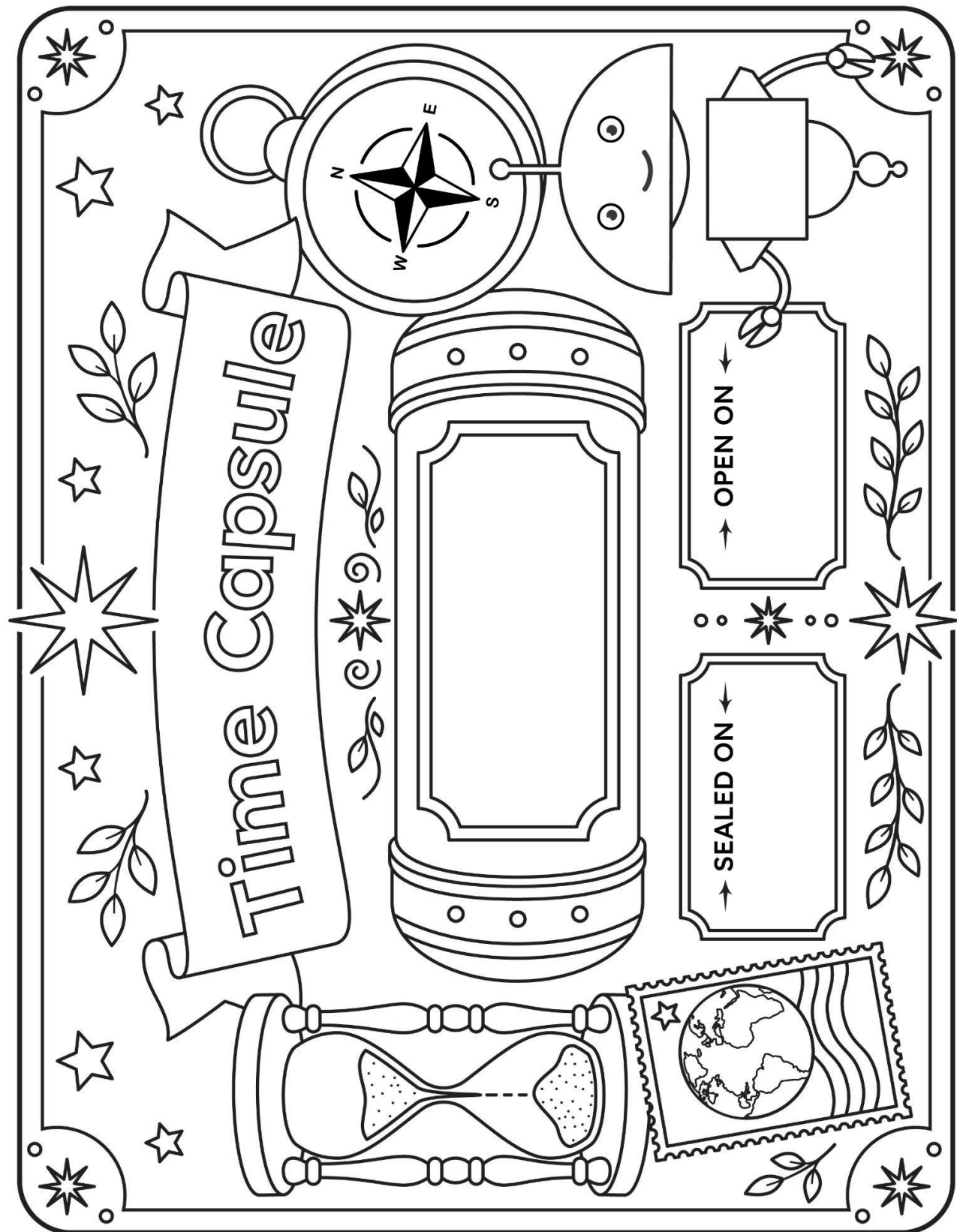
What Will You Include?

Category	Item	Why it matters
A personal object		
Something that represents your culture/family		
A prediction for this school year		
A current event or headline		
A message to the future		



Activity
Create Your Own Time Capsule

Back to School 2026
9-12 Activities





Directions: The things we enjoy, value, and spend our time on help tell the story of who we are. Each puzzle piece represents one part of your life right now. Fill in each piece by writing, drawing, or both.

Pieces of Me

Someone who has made a difference in my life	A book, movie, or show I'd recommend	Something I've been thinking about lately
One goal I'm working toward		A song that describes me right now
	WHO I AM TODAY	
A strength I'm proud of	A place where I feel most like myself	Something that always makes me smile
		

You are one of a kind. Don't forget to celebrate what makes you, *YOU!*


Continue to next page



More About Me

Directions: Everyone is unique! Think about what makes you, *you*. Write or circle your answers to share more about yourself.

Three Words That Describe Me



A Quote or Motto That Means a Lot to Me



If I Could Have Dinner With Anyone...

Who would it be and what would you ask them?



Something That I Hope Never Changes



Would You Rather...?

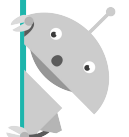
Circle your choice.



- | | | |
|------------|----|-----------|
| Mountains | or | Beach |
| Early bird | or | Night owl |
| Stay in | or | Go out |
| Comedy | or | Drama |
| Spotify | or | YouTube |
| Save | or | Spend |
| Text | or | Call |

Did You Know?

Thinking about the things you love and care about can boost your mood, build confidence, and help you understand yourself better. Keep being you!





Writing Activity

Letter to My Future Self

Back to School 2026
9-12 Activities

In this activity, you'll write a letter to your future self to come back to at the end of the school year or when you open your time capsule.

Directions:

1. Read the letter Omar wrote to his future self for inspiration.
2. Prepare your letter.
 - ☐ Using the template on the next page, fill in the blanks by writing, drawing, or using another way that works best for you.
 - ☐ Fold your letter and seal it. You might use tape or an envelope.
 - ☐ Save it in a safe place, or add it to your time capsule.
 - ☐ Set your own reminder (phone, calendar, planner) to read it on the last day of school or when you open your time capsule.
3. When you read it later, reflect on how much you've changed and how well you met your goal.



Dear Future Me,

This school year, I hope to grow in the following ways: I hope to get better at pushing myself to use all my resources when the lesson is more difficult.

Something I am excited about for this school year is starting to look at colleges to begin deciding what I want to do after high school.

One thing I want to remember about me right now is how I am nervous about the future but also how much I have already figured out.

This school year, my goal is to balance my part-time job and schoolwork.

This goal matters to me because I want to prove I can handle the responsibility.

Here's my plan (what you'll do, how often, and how you'll stay on track): On Mondays, I will put my work shifts and my lessons for the week in my planner.

I'll know it's working when I am making money and progressing in my schoolwork.

If I get off track, I will take the time to check my planner and ask my dad for help.

I predict that by the end of the year, I will have an idea of what I want to do after I finish high school and how I can accomplish that.

Love,

Me



Dear Future Me,

This school year, I hope to grow in the following ways: _____
_____.

Something I am excited about for this school year is _____
_____.

One thing I want to remember about me right now is _____
_____.

This school year, my goal is to _____
_____.

This goal matters to me because _____
_____.

Here's my plan (what you'll do, how often, and how you'll stay on track): _____
_____.

I'll know it's working when _____
_____.

If I get off track, I will _____
_____.

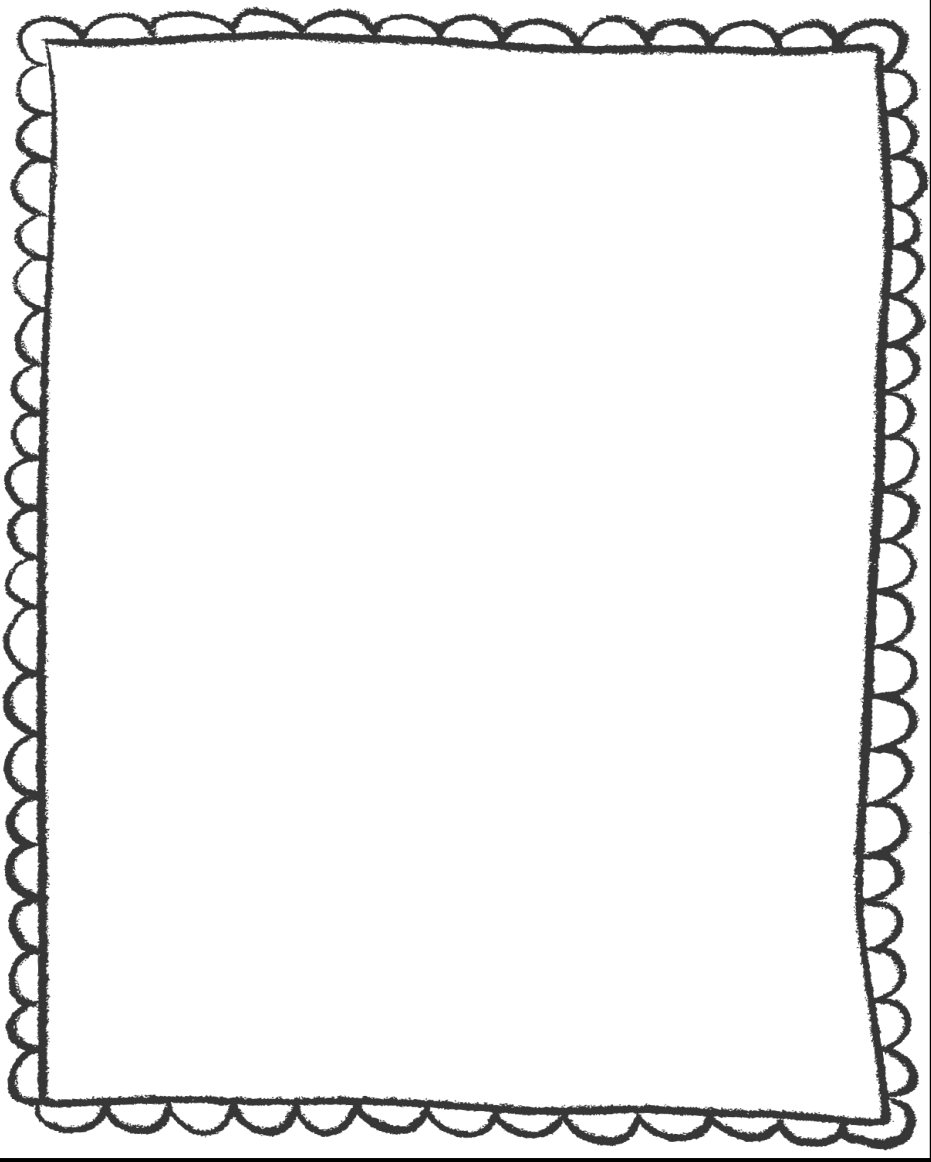
I predict that by the end of the year, I will _____
_____.

Love,

Me



Directions: Draw a self-portrait to represent the characteristics that make you special. Use the boxes in the frame to tell more about who you are by writing or drawing a picture!

Something I like to do	What I like to be called	My favorite food
Something I'm really good at		My favorite color
Something I'd like to do when I'm older		My favorite music
		The best thing about me



Activity Solve a Back-to-School Joke

Back to School 2026
9-12 Activities

Directions: August 16th is National Joke Day! Answer the questions below and use the key to find the answer to the joke!

Solve for the variable.

S

$$-4y + 12 = 2y$$

$$y = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Solve for the variable.

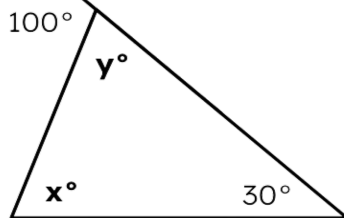
I

$$3x + 5x = 40$$

$$x = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Solve for x.

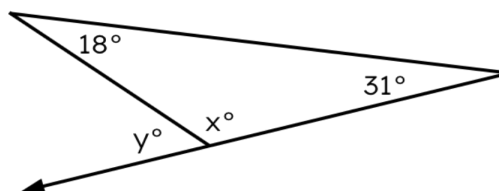
D



$$x = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Solve for y.

V



$$y = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Solve for a.

I

$$-3(11 + a) = 7(3 - 3a)$$

$$a = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Solve for k.

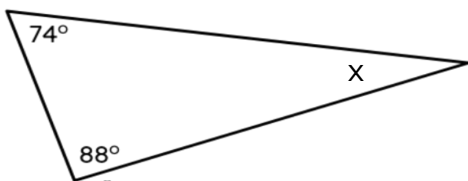
O

$$7 + 4k + 8 = 2k - 6 + 5$$

$$k = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Find the missing angle.

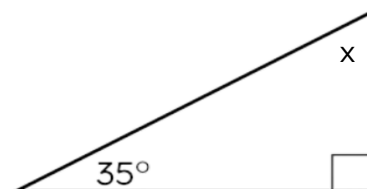
N



$$x = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

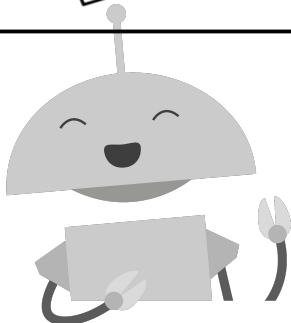
Find the missing angle.

I



$$x = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Why did the student wear glasses while doing math?



He wanted to improve his

$\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ $\underline{\hspace{1cm}}$
70 5 49 55 2 3 -8 18



What Is Stress?

Between classes, friendships, activities, and everything else, it's normal to feel stressed sometimes. Stress is your body's natural response to challenges or change. A little stress can help you stay focused and motivated, but too much stress can make it harder to think clearly, manage your emotions, or solve problems. Learning to recognize stress is the first step toward managing it a healthy way.



What Stresses Me Out?

Directions: Everyone's stress triggers are different. Check the situations that sometimes cause you stress, then add any others that are unique to you.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ School/Academics | ☐ Friendships | ☐ Busy schedule |
| ☐ Tests and grades | ☐ Family expectations | ☐ My future |
| ☐ _____ | ☐ _____ | ☐ _____ |

How Do I Know I'm Stressed?

Directions: Stress can affect your thoughts, feelings, and body. Check the stress signals you've experienced, then write down any other signs you notice when you're feeling stressed.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Overthinking | ☐ Irritable or angry | ☐ Trouble focusing |
| ☐ Trouble sleeping | ☐ Feeling nervous | ☐ Feeling tired |
| ☐ _____ | ☐ _____ | ☐ _____ |

Healthy Ways To Cope

A **coping strategy** is something you can do to handle stress, calm down, or refocus when life feels overwhelming.

Everyone has tough days. Having a few go-to strategies can help you stay calm and keep moving forward.

Examples of coping strategies

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| • Stretching | • Baking |
| • Playing a sport | • Walking |
| • Drawing | • Journaling |
| • Playing with a pet | • Meditating |



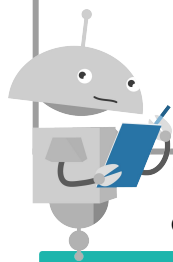
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**My Calm
Plan**

Directions: Everyone experiences stress differently. Think about situations that challenge you and create a plan for how you'll respond in a healthy way. Use the examples below for ideas, then add your own.

WHEN I FEEL...	INSTEAD OF...	I WILL...
Example: Overwhelmed before a big test	Example: Panicking; avoiding studying	Example: Take five deep breaths; break the study time into smaller chunks



Bonus Brainstorm: Think about the people and places that help you feel safe, calm, and supported. Write down a few that you can turn to when you need them.

Try a Calm-Down Bottle

A **calm-down bottle** is one tool that can help you pause, focus, and reset.

You will need...

- ☐ A clear plastic bottle or jar with lid
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Clear glue or glitter glue
- ☐ Glitter
- ☐ Food coloring (optional)
- ☐ Sequins, beads, or small charms
- ☐ An adult to help seal the lid

How to make one:

1. Fill a clear plastic bottle $\frac{3}{4}$ full with warm water.
2. Add 2-4 tablespoons of clear glue or glitter glue.
3. Add glitter and any extras you like (sequins, beads, small pom-poms).
4. Add 2-3 drops of food coloring (optional).
5. Screw on the lid tightly. You may glue the lid shut for extra safety.
6. Gently shake the bottle, set it down, and watch the glitter settle.
7. Take slow, deep breaths while you wait!





Activity Motto Cube

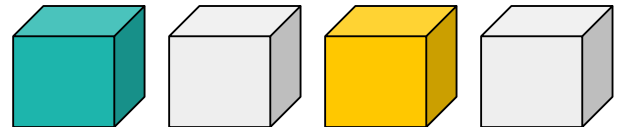
Back to School 2026
9-12 Activities

A motto is a short phrase or statement you return to when you need focus, grounding, or motivation.

Directions: Print the motto cube net on the next page. Then, answer each prompt on the cube net with words or pictures. Use the bullets below for extra ideas and support. Finally, cut, fold, and glue or tape the tabs to create your motto cube.

Materials:

- Motto cube net (next page)
- Scissors
- Glue stick or tape
- Markers, pens, or colored pencils

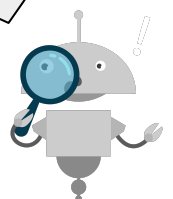


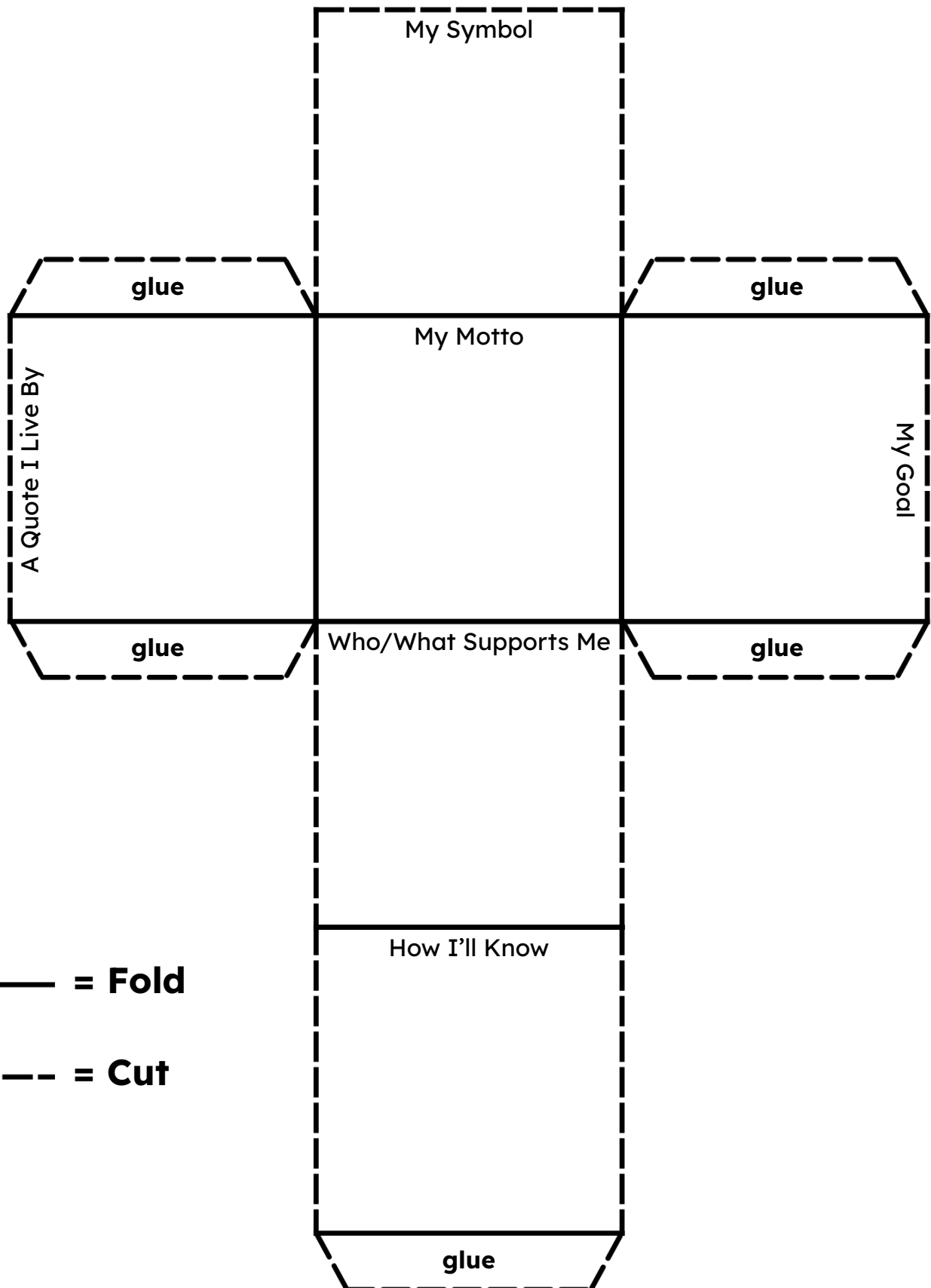
Panel Prompts:

1. **My Motto:** Write a short phrase or sentence that captures how you want to move through this school year. This one should be your own words, not borrowed from a quote, lyric, or someone else's saying (that's what Panel 4 is for!). Here are a few examples:
 - "Growth happens outside my comfort zone."
 - "I define my own worth, not other people's opinions."
 - "Progress matters more than perfection."
2. **My Symbol:** Design a small icon, doodle, or symbol that represents your motto. What image comes to mind when you think about it?
3. **My Goal:** Name one specific goal you're working toward this year. What would success actually look like?
4. **A Quote To Live By:** Share a quote from a book, song, speech, movie, or person in your life that captures something you believe in. It should be borrowed from someone else, unlike your motto. Why does it resonate with you?
5. **Who/What Supports Me:** Who or what will help you stay grounded in this motto when things get hard? Consider people, routines, habits, or reminders.
6. **How I'll Know:** How will you know you're actually living your motto, not just writing it down? What will you notice in your own choices or habits?

Motto comes from the Latin word *muttire*, meaning "to mutter." In Italian, it became the word for a saying attached to a family crest.

Keep It Visible: Now that your cube is built, pick a spot where you'll see it daily, like your desk or nightstand. A motto is easy to forget once life gets busy, but one you see every day keeps working even when you're not actively thinking about it.





—— = **Fold**

---- = **Cut**



Activity Back-to-School Word Search

Back to School 2026
9-12 Activities

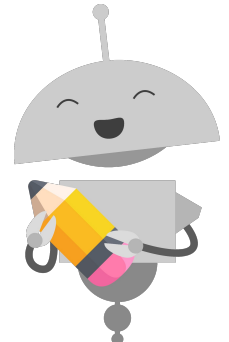
X	W	I	L	P	R	O	J	E	C	T	I	Y	Y	F
F	H	O	K	U	A	L	P	D	T	Z	H	W	J	V
H	A	D	O	T	N	E	D	N	E	P	E	D	N	I
S	U	B	J	E	C	T	X	C	A	B	Q	F	L	G
G	M	W	R	T	K	R	S	R	U	E	A	I	B	P
R	J	N	E	O	Z	N	G	C	O	R	T	T	Y	L
A	O	A	N	G	S	O	G	C	H	E	I	G	E	S
D	U	P	N	E	E	I	V	R	R	E	O	O	I	C
U	R	X	A	G	Q	S	E	A	W	L	D	S	U	A
A	N	V	L	R	M	S	T	T	O	I	Y	U	L	S
T	A	G	P	C	E	U	N	I	A	L	R	G	L	P
I	L	W	X	A	R	C	B	K	A	X	E	A	G	E
O	T	J	R	E	Y	S	Y	N	Z	B	N	O	W	Q
N	W	C	J	C	B	I	A	C	R	L	M	U	N	M
Z	H	U	W	Y	U	D	Y	A	H	J	P	M	R	A

algebra
subject
geography
independent

schedule
journal
planner
curious

research
analysis
literature
project

biology
graduation
discussion
debate



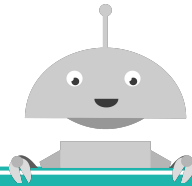


Directions: Answer each prompt with a number about yourself. Then, use each given math challenge to practice your skills!

Example: My Age

Evaluate $f(x) = 2x^2 - 3x + 1$, when x is your age.

$$f(15) = 2(15)^2 - 3(15) + 1$$
$$f(15) = 406$$



Challenge!

Pick one box and create your own function using that number. Then evaluate it.

Math About Me

1 Evaluate $f(x) = 2x^2 - 3x + 1$, when x is your age.

2 Evaluate $f(x) = |x - 10| + 4$, when x is the sum of letters in your first and last name.

3 Evaluate $\sqrt{x^2 + 9}$, when x is the number of books you want to read this year.

4 Evaluate $|2x - 15|$, when x is your age 2 years ago.

5 Evaluate $2 - x^2$, when x is the number of pets you have (or wish you had).

6 Evaluate $f(x) = (x + 2)(x - 3)$, when x is your birth month (1-12).

7 Evaluate $x^3 - 3x^2 + 2$, when x is your favorite number.

8 Evaluate $x(1.15)^2$, when x is the number of new things you want to learn this year.