Discussion Guide & Resources

Created by the iTeach team at Kennesaw State University

the CIRCLES ALL AROUND US

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Discussion Guide

"In the circles all around us everywhere that we all go,
there's a difference we can make and a love we can all show."

Discuss:

- How does it feel to be in your own circle, by yourself?
- In the book, Brad compares being in your own circle to being a library with one book on the shelf. What other similes or metaphors can you come up with to describe what it is like to be in your own circle?
- Who can you bring into your circle?
- Why is it uncomfortable to draw bigger circles and invite others in?
- In what ways are we unique? How does this make our circles different?
- What does it look like to make our circles wider and welcome others inside?
- What wonderful things happen when we have wide circles?
- How does it feel to be on the outside of a circle?
- Caring for others doesn't require grand gestures! Brad encourages us to "Let our caring ripple out in a million little ways." What can we do each day to create little ripples of love and care for others?
- At the end of the book, we revisit our own circle, where all the love begins. Why is it important to care for and love your own circle? How can we take care of our own circle so we are able to welcome others in?

Reflect:

- Complete the *The Circles All Around Us* Flipbook activity. After creating your book, reflect on the following questions:
  - Who is in your first three circles? What do you notice about the circles closest to you?
  - What do you notice about the wider circles farther away?
  - Who might you want to add to your circles that you currently do not include?
  - How can we show care to those that may not feel included in our circles?

Act:

- Bring new people into your circle by creating little ripples of love and care in your community. For ideas on how to get started, see *The Circles All Around Us* Service Guide.

Curriculum Connection:

- Similes and metaphors are used to compare two unlike things. They can be used to emphasize ideas, create vivid pictures in readers' minds, and help us see things from a new perspective. In this book, Brad uses a simile to help us understand what it is like to be alone in your circle:

  "You could keep that circle closed to everyone but yourself...
  but that would be like a library with just one book on the shelf."

- Think about a world where everyone has welcomed others into their large circles. Write a simile or metaphor that describes what this feels like.

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Flipbook Project

Directions:

1. Read the text: *The Circles All Around Us* by Brad Montague.
2. Begin with the smallest circle - a safe little place for just one person. Write or draw a picture of yourself inside the circle.
3. The next circle is for you and your family to share. Write or draw about your immediate family.
4. Make the next circle even happier by including other loved ones.
5. In the next circle, let a few more people know they are welcome to come in by writing or drawing about your friends.
6. There is a difference you can make, and a love you can show everywhere you go. In the last and largest circle, write or draw about the people all around you that could be welcomed into your circles.
7. Cut along the dotted edge outside of the figure on each page. When cutting, be sure to keep the rectangle attached to the circle.
8. Stack the circles from largest to smallest, with the largest on the bottom and the smallest on the top.
9. Staple along the lines on the rectangle to complete your book.

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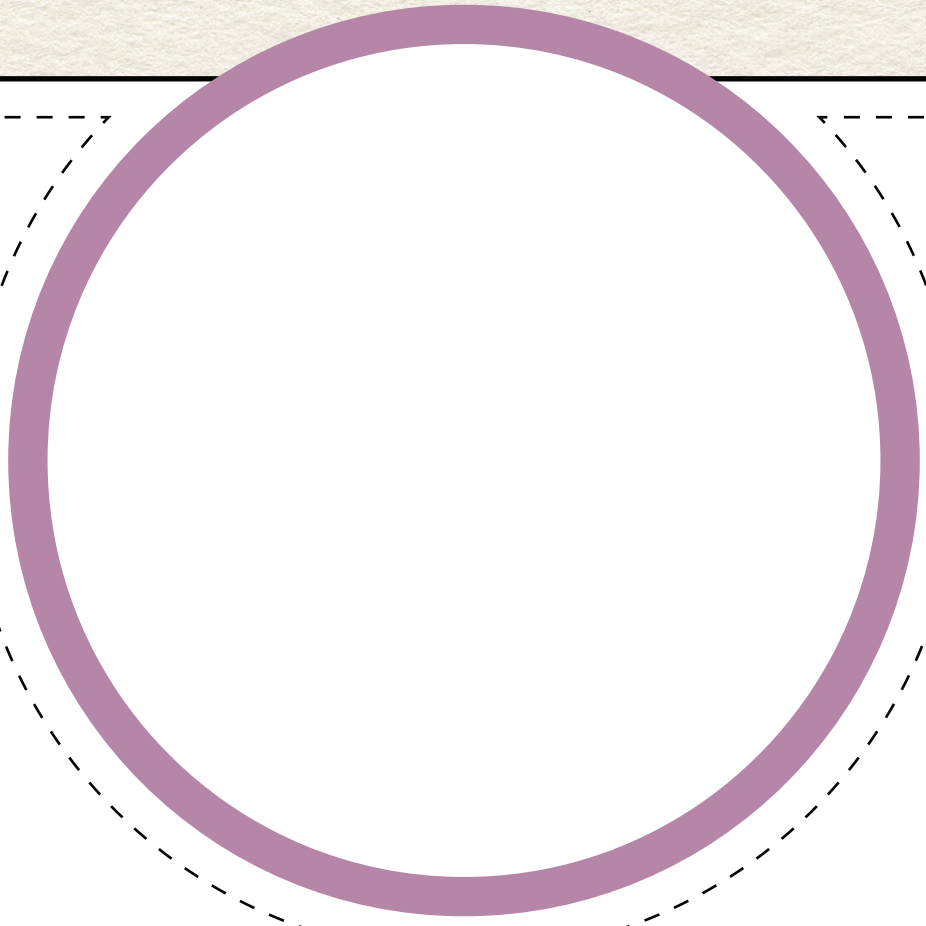
CIRCLES ALL AROUND US



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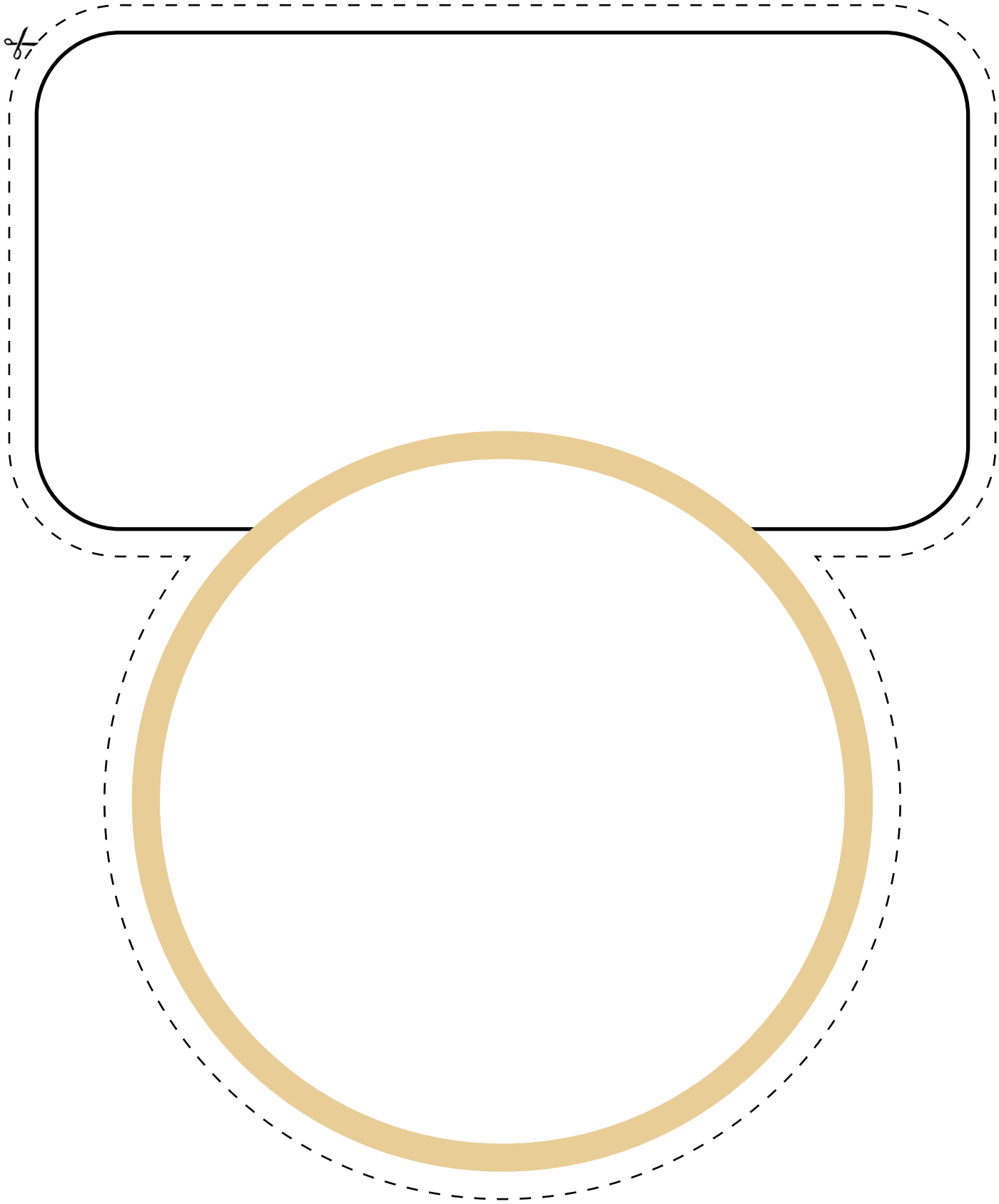

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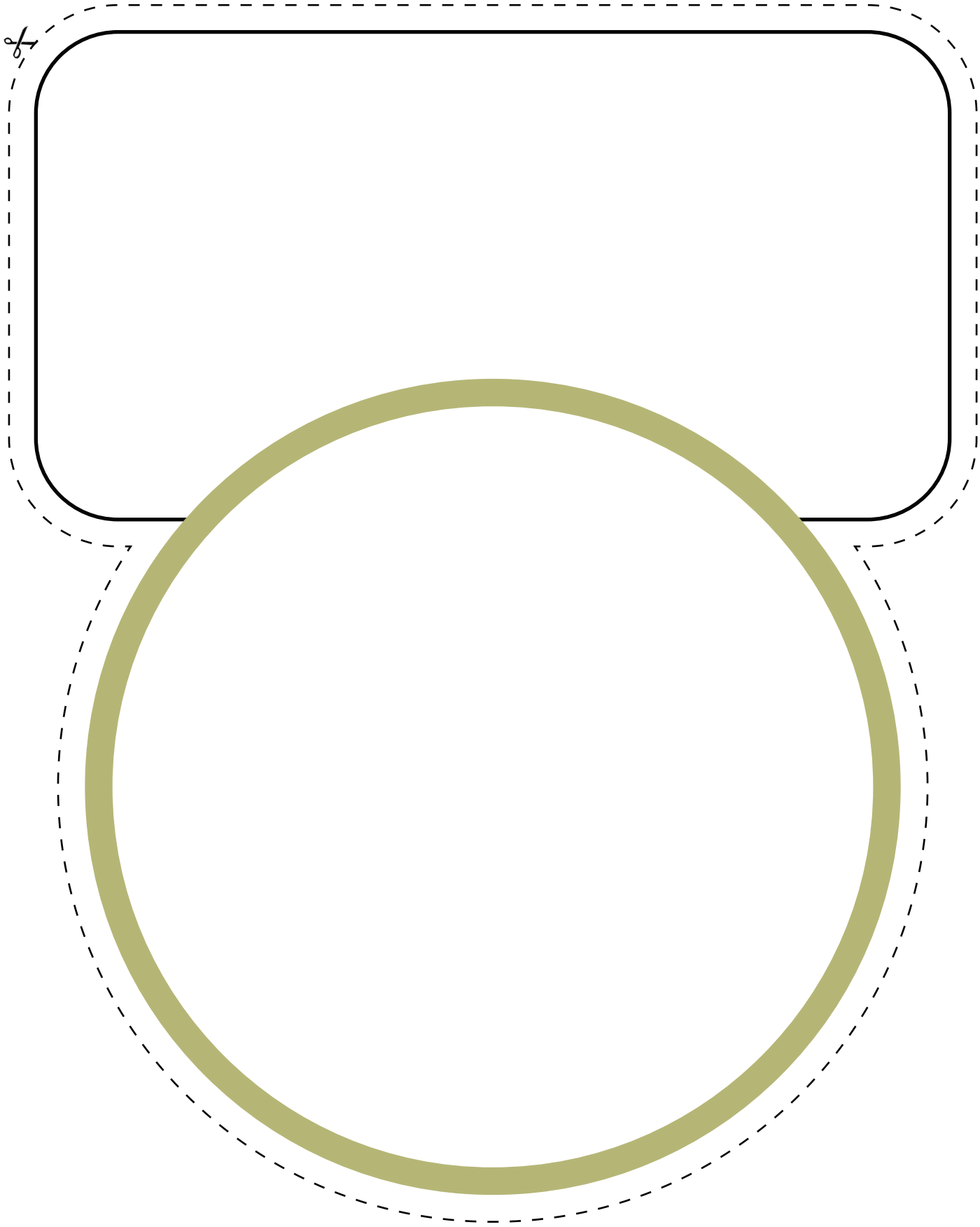

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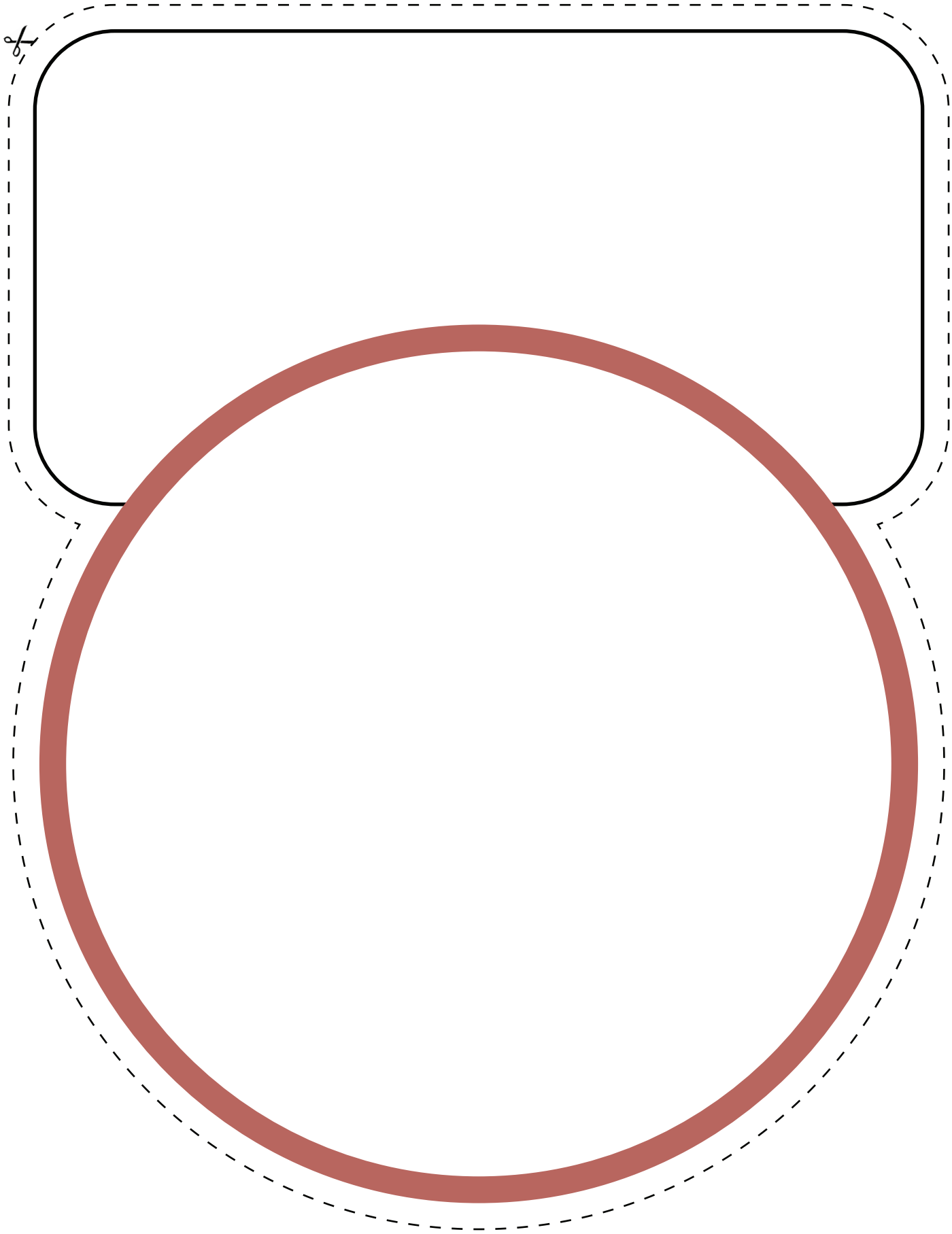

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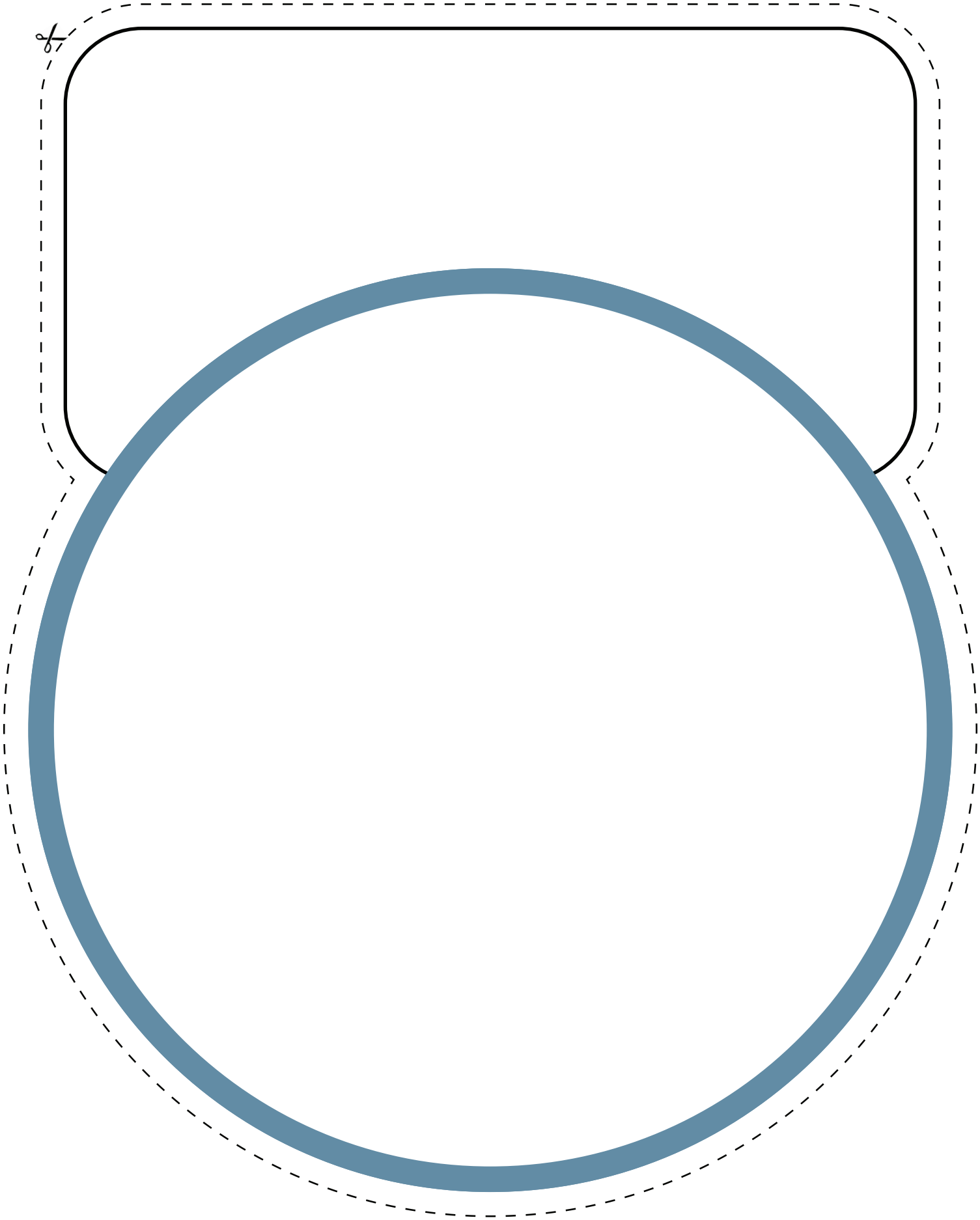

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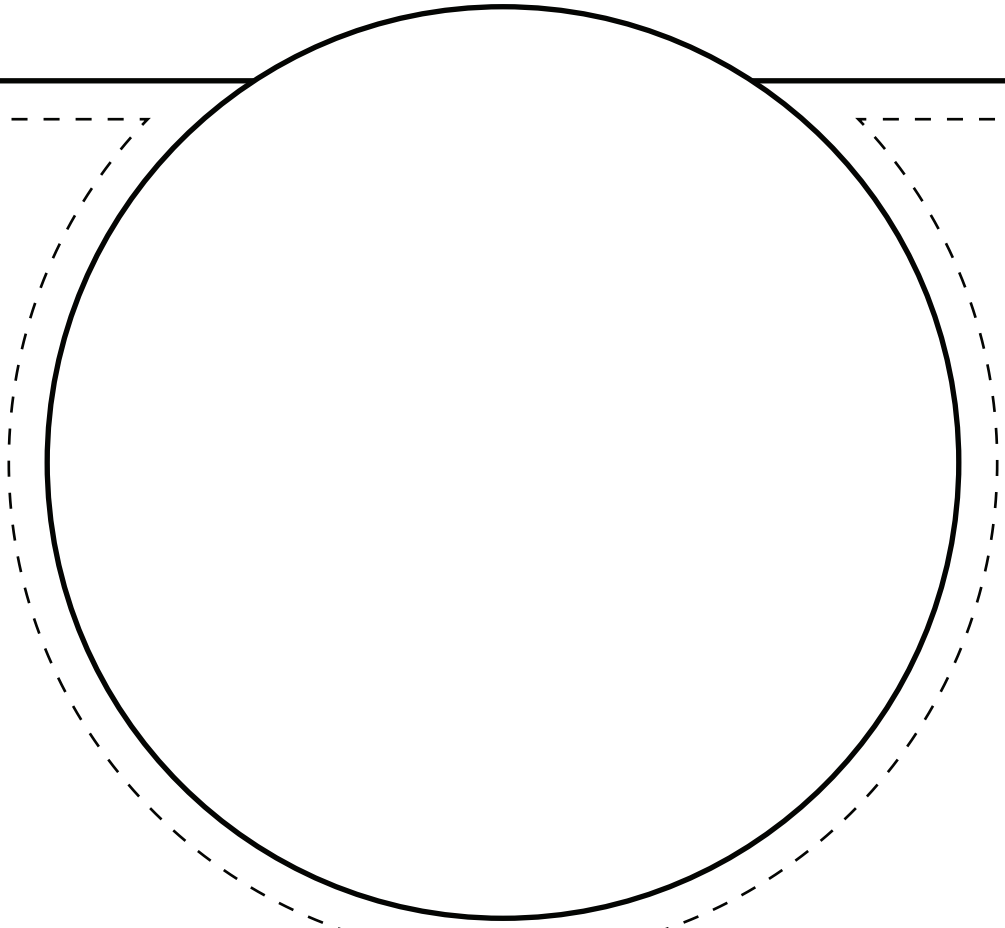

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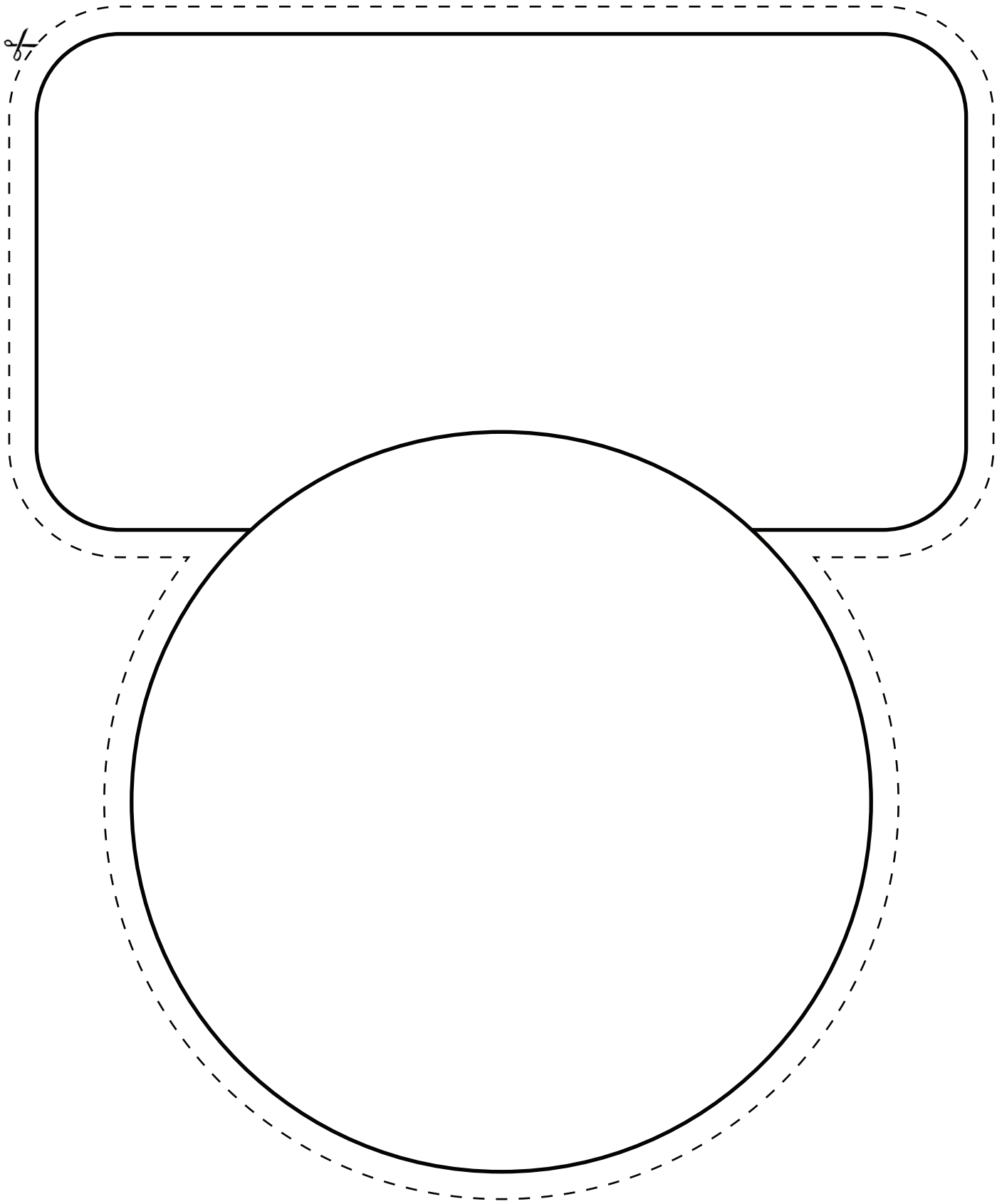

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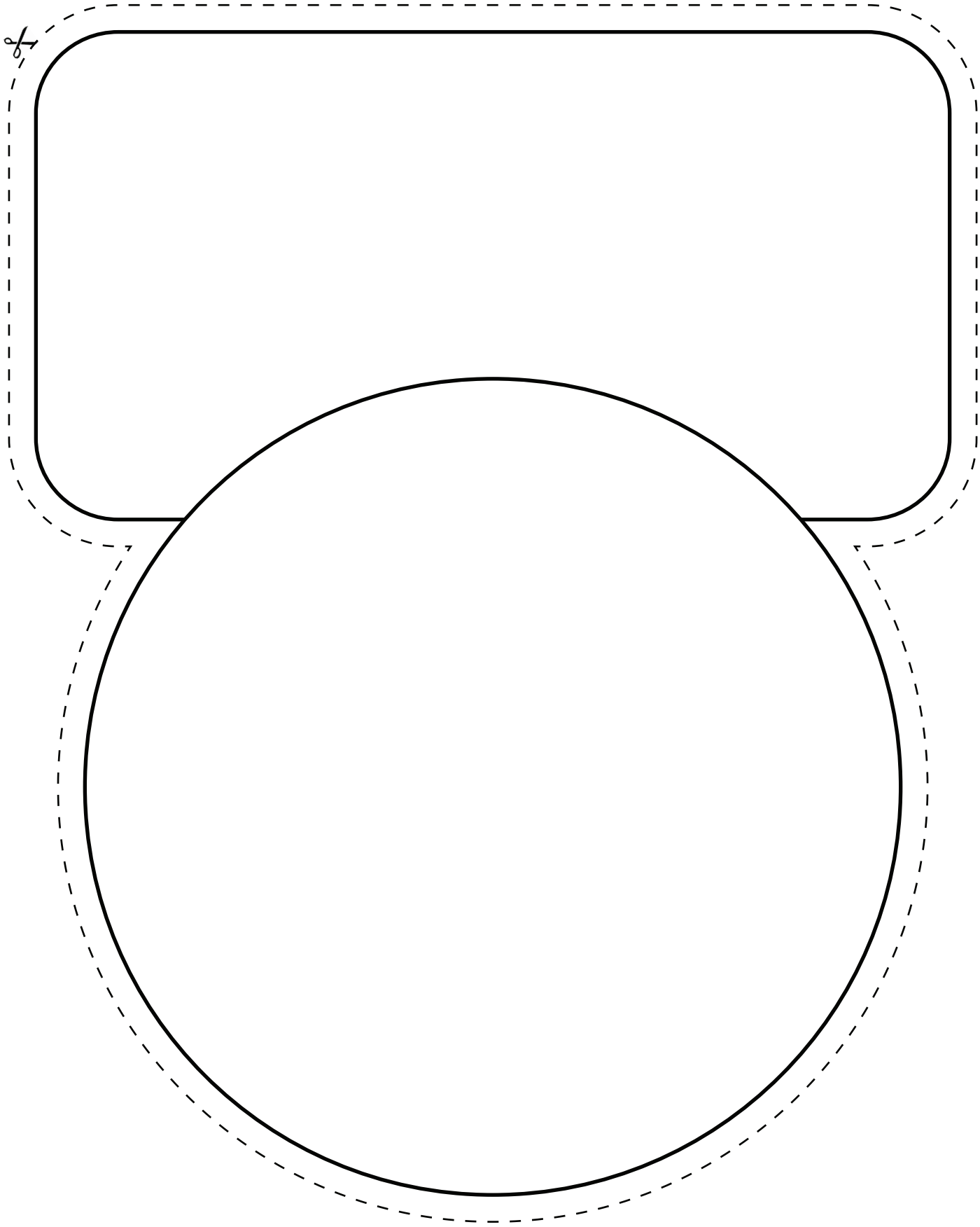

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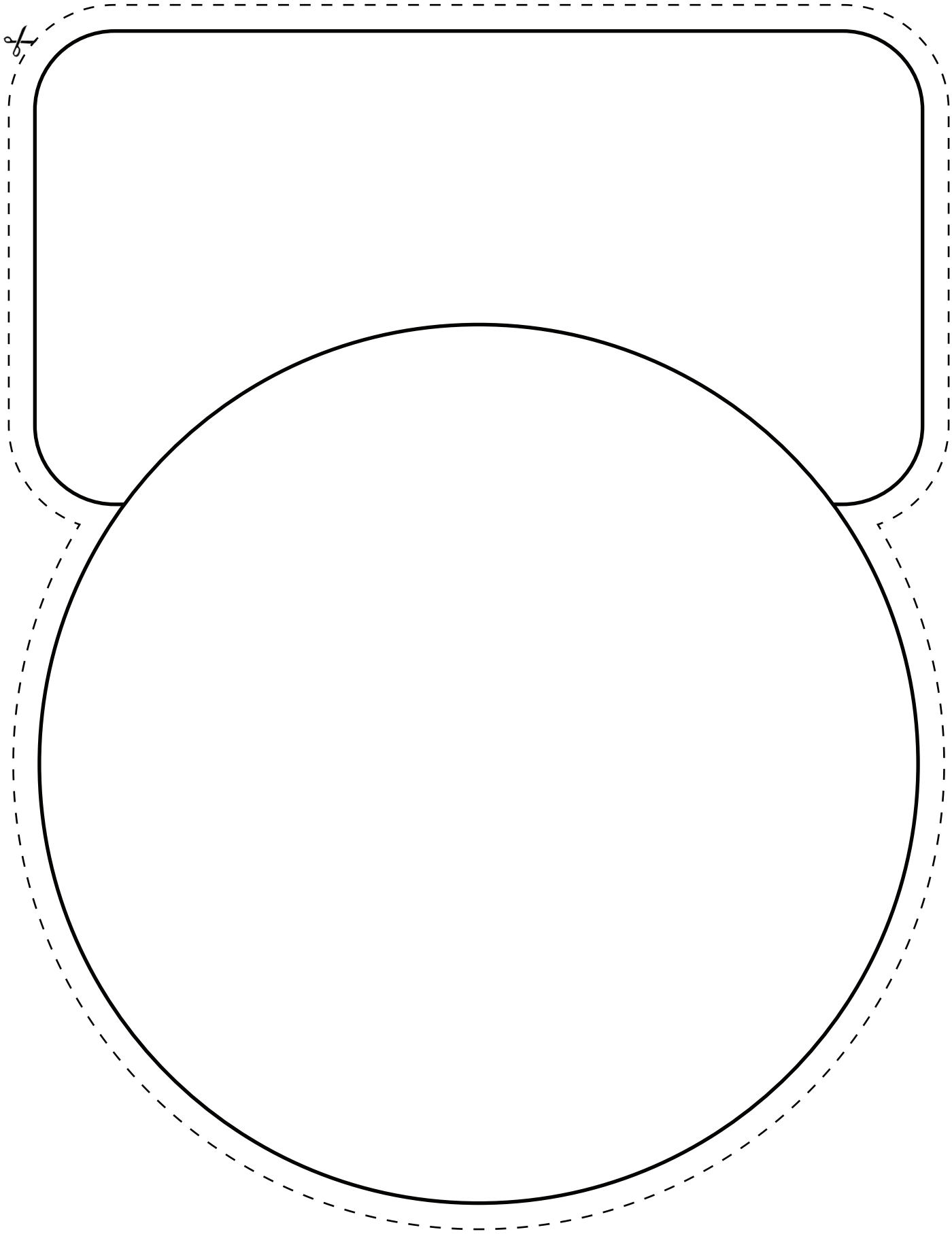

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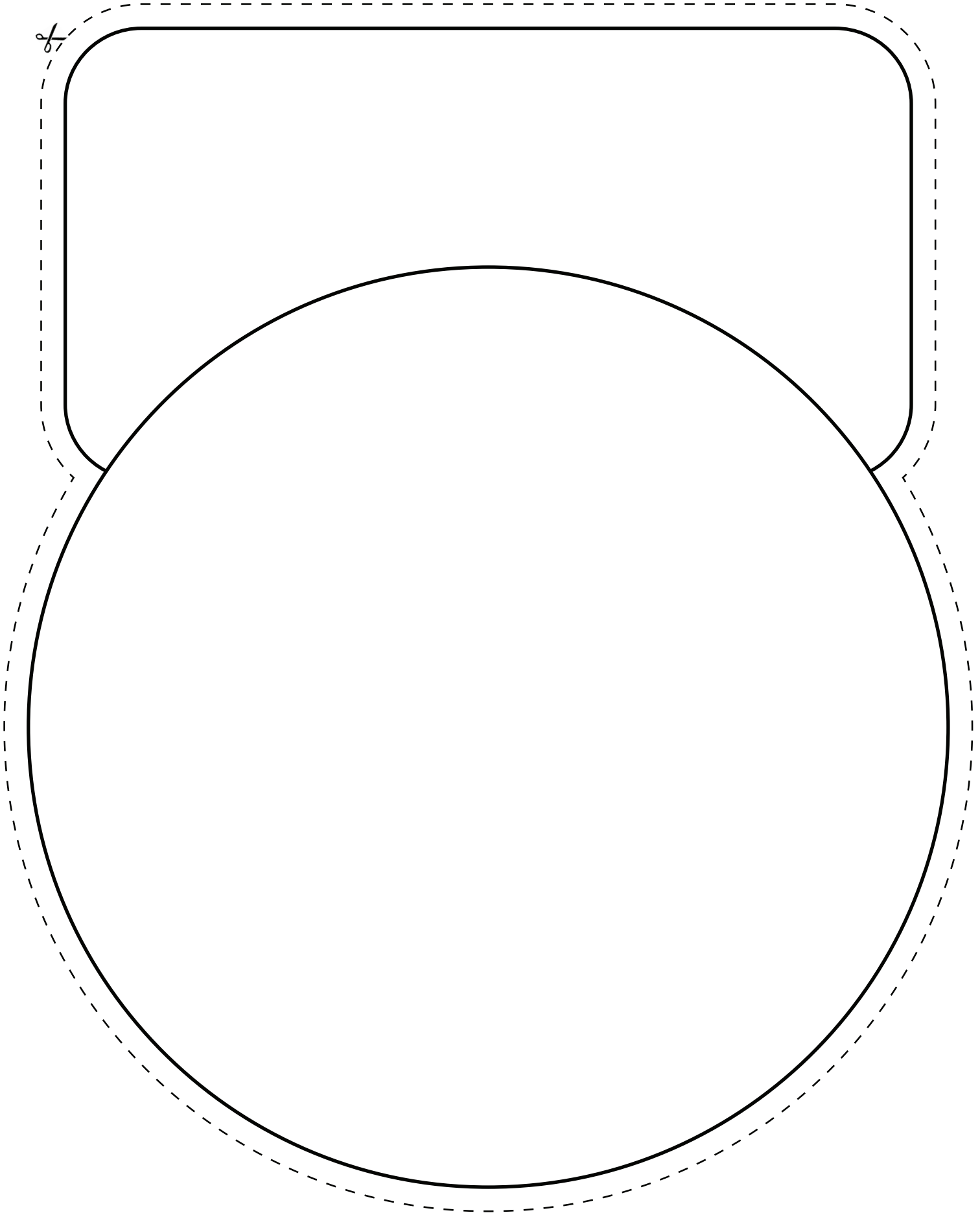

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Service Projects

"...Let our caring ripple out in a million little ways."

Service projects can help us grow our circles by showing care and compassion to others.

Work with friends, schoolmates, and/or family to help clean up a park.

Organize a food drive in your neighborhood.

Reach out to a nursing home or hospital and prepare a talent show to entertain residents.

Beautify your community by creating a garden in a public space.

Collect books to donate to schools, hospitals, or libraries in your community.

Create thank you cards to show your appreciation for people in your community.

Write inspirational messages on pencils, rocks, or sticky notes & leave them for others to find.

Become a "Secret Agent of Awesome." Click here to learn how.

Anonymously leave small gifts, cards, or drawings for a neighbor.

Need more inspiration? Check out the websites below.
Use filters or search by keyword to find the perfect service project for you:

- Kids that Do Good
- Generation On
- WE Schools
- Volunteer Match
- Do Something

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Service Project Guide

The best way to grow our circles is to show love and care to the people around us! Families and classrooms can use this guide to plan their own service project that benefits the community.

Identify a community that is important to you. (You could focus on a smaller community, such as your school, your neighborhood, or the town where you live. Or, you might think about a larger community within your state, country, or even the world!)
Brainstorm a list of needs you see within this community. List as many ideas as you can! Consider using the news or the Internet to research important issues, or talking to members of the community to learn about what is important to them. **Then work to narrow down your list and identify your best idea. Ask yourself:** • **Do we have the time and resources needed to address this need?** • **Is this need important to the community?** • **Is there anyone in the community already working on this project that you can team up with?**

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Service Project Guide

What need or issue will your project address?
What is the difference you want to make by completing your project?
What materials and supplies will you need?
What is the timeline for your project?

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Service Project Guide

Describe the step-by-step process you will follow to complete your project.
Who can you invite into your circle to help with this project? Who would be interested in getting involved?

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Service Project Guide

Reflect on your project. What worked? What was a challenge?
Grow your circles even more by celebrating. How will you share the results of your project with others?

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Cross-Cultural Learning in the Classroom

The Circles All Around Us highlights the importance of community and how much we all matter to each other. As educators, we help students create bigger and bigger circles of community when we flatten the walls of our classrooms to connect with other learners around the globe. Global collaboration offers extensive benefits to students, including:

- Helping students recognize and appreciate the perspectives and views of others to broaden mutual understanding
- Learning to clearly communicate ideas with diverse audiences
- Building empathy and developing a sense of interconnectedness by recognizing commonalities and valuing differences
- Developing care and concern for issues beyond their immediate environment
- Recognizing the importance of working toward collective well-being on a global scale
- Preparing students for increasingly globalized workplaces

Through the use of technology, it is easier than ever to open our classroom doors to the world! The organizations below offer a wealth of resources designed to make it simple and easy for classrooms to connect and collaborate through cross-cultural learning experiences.

- Empatico features a platform that connects classrooms around the world to complete standards-and research-based activities that fit easily into existing curriculum.
- TakingITGlobal for Educators offers a free online platform for classrooms to complete collaborative projects focused on shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable world.
- Flipgrid is a free video discussion platform. Teachers can activate the #GridPals feature in their Flipgrid profile to connect with a network of educators who want to create meaningful global learning experiences. Read this #GridPals Adventure Passport for a step-by-step guide to getting started.
- WorldVuze is a free platform where students around the world can create and answer questions, allowing learners to explore diverse perspectives, identify patterns in responses, and work to understand different viewpoints.
- Members of iEARN-USA have access to over 100 global projects designed to connect K-12 classrooms around the world.
- ePals connects K-12 classrooms in more than 99 countries to share ideas and collaborate on projects, including pen pal exchanges.
- Exploring by the Seat of Your Pants hosts more than 25 Google Hangout events each month, allowing classrooms to connect with leading scientists and explorers across the globe.
- During the Awesome Squiggles global art challenge, students create original art based on four squiggly lines and then share their artwork around the world.
- Each year, students around the world connect to exchange Virtual Valentines while building geographical awareness and cultural understanding.
- The Global Read Aloud takes place during a set 6-week period two times each year. During this time, classrooms around the world read aloud the same book and work to make as many global connections as possible while reading.
- Seesaw allows students to document their learning using photos, videos, audio, and text. By enabling Connected Blogs within the Seesaw platform, students can collaborate and share with other classes around the world.
- Edublog's Student Blogging Challenge occurs twice each year. Participating classes complete eight weekly tasks in order to improve blogging and commenting skills while connecting with a global audience.

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Creating Circles with SEL

"Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Many schools and districts utilize programs and curriculum designed to support students' social and emotional development. This is an excellent way to help create safe and healthy school communities. However, it is also critical to support students' social and emotional learning (SEL) through consistent, positive interactions and relationships between students and teachers. In this guide, we offer strategies to integrate SEL across content areas and throughout the school day. Taking the time to build these skills will help students and educators create bigger circles all around us, where love is known and felt.

RELATIONSHIPS

Build Strong Relationships With Students

Building strong relationships with students is an excellent way to consistently model what healthy relationship skills look like. Work hard to establish authentic relationships with each student. As you begin a new school year, building relationships should be a primary focus, before you even begin to teach standards and content.

Talk to your students about more than just the content. Ask them about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Seek to learn and grow from them. Tap into student experiences and knowledge during instruction. Giving students the opportunity to share who they are can transform the classroom.

Create Time And Space For Communication

Relationships are built through communication. Students need time to talk and share about their feelings, experiences, progress, goals, strengths, and challenges. Structure your class to create dedicated time and space for students to communicate and connect with you and with each other.

- Use a collaborative writing program like Google Docs or Microsoft Word Online to set up a two-way journal. When both the student and teacher have editing rights to a shared document, the space can be used for ongoing conversation. Similarly, you might use the comment feature on tools such as Seesaw, a blog, or a discussion board to engage in two-way conversation.
- When it comes to building relationships with students, nothing beats time together. But getting started with individual student conferences can feel overwhelming! Read about how to get started in this blog post.

Greet Students At The Door

- A classroom is a community in which students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences come to learn. As educators, we must work to ensure that every student is seen as an individual within this diverse environment. Greeting students as they enter the classroom and making efforts to use their names will help students feel emotionally supported and noticed in a room full of people. In fact, research shows that greeting students at the classroom door produces significant improvements in academic engagement and reduces disruptive behavior during class. In addition, beginning each class period with individual greetings establishes a routine for entering the classroom, modeling positive relationships and helping students to regulate their emotions as they enter.

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Creating Circles with SEL

Utilize Welcoming Rituals

Welcoming Rituals are designed to help students connect to each other and to learning objectives. These purposeful routines create a positive classroom culture by providing space and time for students and teachers to build relationships. There are many kinds of Welcoming Routines - some that involve movement, discussion, reflection, critical thinking, connection, and more. It is best to align the selected activities with students' current physical, emotional, and intellectual needs. Welcoming Rituals encourage teachers to be intentional about how they begin class each day and set the stage for meaningful learning to take place by establishing consistency and routine in the classroom.

Student Voice

The first step to building strong relationships in the classroom is to create an environment where all students feel respected and heard. By creating opportunities for students to share their voices, educators can show them that their emotions and thoughts have meaning and value. When these foundational needs are met, students are equipped to reach beyond their circles and invite others in.

- Ask students to set goals and support them as they work toward those goals. This helps you determine what students value about their learning, while also helping you connect with them as they grow.
- Invite students to provide feedback on teaching and learning in your classroom. Show students that their thoughts and opinions have an impact on classroom culture and practices by listening to their feedback and putting it to use!
- Give students choices in what and how they learn. Utilize a variety of media, both digital and non-digital, to offer choice in content delivery. Choice boards are a great strategy to offer options in the classroom. You can also integrate interest-based learning strategies, such as Genius Hour or Project Based Learning.
- Utilize technology tools that amplify student voice and enable students to demonstrate their learning using their preferred modalities, talents, and interests:
  - Flipgrid: Students can use this response platform to record videos that include pictures, files, text, emojis, digital inking, and screen sharing.
  - Seesaw: In this digital learning journal, students can use creative tools such as drawing, photo, video and note taking to uniquely demonstrate their learning.
  - Anchor: Set up a podcasting platform for students to voice their opinion, respond to current events, reflect on readings, present a project, and more. Podcasts can help students connect to an audience outside of the four walls of their classroom.
  - Book Creator: Create digital books that can be shared with families, peers or other authors!
  - Adobe Spark: Give students a space to work creatively. They can develop professional-looking images, videos or presentations.

Have Fun!

Integrate activities that will bring you together as a class and allow students to have some fun. These social activities allow students to build communication and relationship skills in a natural way as they have time for authentic interaction with their peers. Some ideas to get you started: Host a talent show, comedy social, class picnic, or silent disco.

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COLLABORATION

Characteristics Of A Collaborative Task

Providing students with opportunities to collaborate in the classroom is an excellent way to develop the skills that are needed to widen our circles. When designing collaborative learning opportunities, keep in mind the following characteristics of collaborative tasks:

- **Positive Interdependence:** Group members must work together to achieve a common goal.
- Individual Accountability: Students take responsibility for their learning. Each member is responsible for doing his or her part.
- **Shared Knowledge:** The teacher is not viewed as the sole source of information. Teachers and students recognize that the knowledge, experiences, and ideas of many individuals are a critical part of the learning process.
- **Constructive Interaction:** Group members support and encourage each other.
- **Effective Interpersonal Skills:** Students are taught how to communicate, solve problems, and resolve conflict effectively.
- **Group Processing:** Groups are given time to reflect on how well their group functioned and to make plans for improvement.
- **Teacher as Facilitator:** Teacher provides students with appropriate levels of support, helps them connect their learning, and assists with problem-solving.

Establish Norms

Norms differ from classroom rules in that the students have a hand in creating them instead of being solely designed by the teacher and presented to the students. Norms can guide behavior during classroom interactions and strengthen relationships between learners. Begin by bringing students into the process through a discussion about classroom norms. Talk about what it looks like and sounds like to listen, share ideas, and show respect and kindness to each other. These expectations serve as a model for effective communication and cooperation and will guide students as they grow their circles within the classroom community.

Consider the following steps to create and implement norms in your classroom:

1. Have students reflect on past experiences to identify positive environments and share what made that environment a positive experience.
1. Use the Think-Pair-Share strategy to create a list of behaviors that support a positive learning environment.
1. Aim to establish a list of 4 to 7 norms. Norms should be written in positive, student-friendly language.
1. Prominently display your classroom norms where students can revisit as needed.
1. Show students their norms are important to their classroom community by reviewing norms often to re-establish the expectations.

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Creating Circles with SEL

Strategies To Support Collaboration

There are many ways teachers can prepare students to collaborate deeply and meaningfully. The following strategies are effective ways to provide ongoing guidance and support to students as they learn to work together collaboratively:

- Research shows that collaboration is a skill that must be taught. Specifically, three main areas must be addressed: communicating with others, resolving conflicts, and managing tasks.
- Always look for opportunities to model collaboration skills. For example, teachers can regularly model how to listen, paraphrase, question, and negotiate during classroom interactions.
- Promote positive interdependence by designing a challenging, meaningful, and complex learning activity in which collaboration is an integral part of task completion.
- Set clear expectations to prepare students for collaborative work. Consider using classroom contracts to ensure that students understand their responsibilities regarding group participation.
- Use group roles to give each member of the team a specific job. Identify meaningful team roles that relate to the content and to the task. Ensure that students understand these roles and what will happen if they do not fulfill their responsibilities to the group.
- Work with students to design protocols for handling conflicts and disagreements so they are able to resolve issues within their teams.
- Work to find a balance between providing guidance while also giving students an opportunity to manage aspects of the project themselves. Give students a chance to overcome challenges before jumping in to help.
- Allow students to create a project timeline and divide responsibilities. Teach students how to use a Kanban Board to track deadlines and responsibilities of each group member.
- Talk with students about what effective collaboration looks like. Using tools such as self-assessments, rubrics, and checklists, we can provide students with ongoing information about their progress. Invite students to reflect on their communication and cooperation skills after collaborative experiences, then engage in a discussion about what students noticed.

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EMPATHY & INCLUSIVITY

Diverse Perspectives

As we work to create bigger circles of community, it is important give students opportunities to recognize commonalities and value differences across various cultures and backgrounds. Intentionally integrate resources and activities to highlight diversity in perspective and experience. Support inclusivity and celebrate diversity of thought by encouraging students to share their own perspectives.

- Utilize tools like Flipgrid and Padlet to create digital spaces where students can freely share their ideas. Commenting features of these tools allow students to engage in further discussion as they work to better understand perspectives that differ from their own.
- Provide appropriate support to students while they learn to engage in meaningful discussions. For example, you might find it helpful to provide students with comment starters that they can use when responding to their classmates.

COMMENT STARTERS

This reminds me of..

I realized...

I noticed...

I discovered...

I'm surprised that...

I'd like to know...

I wonder...

I wish I understood why...

I don't understand...

Another thing to consider is...

Although it seems...

I'm not sure that...

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Creating Circles with SEL

Focus on Listening

Stretching and growing our circles requires empathy! A key piece of empathy is *listening*, because listening helps us understand the thoughts and feelings of other people. Use these strategies to teach listening in the classroom so students are equipped to connect meaningfully with others:

- **Talk Less:** Your voice should not be the only one students hear! Following a mini-lesson about an important concept, allow students to talk and listen to each other. Utilize Turn and Talks to give students time to explain their thoughts to a partner.
- **Explicitly Teach Listening Skills:** Work with students to identify what active listening looks like and sounds like. Then, take the time to teach these individual skills! Give students opportunities to practice, role play, and discuss scenarios. Guide students through the learning process with feedback and encouragement.
- **Scaffold Skills:** Create and utilize supports to scaffold student learning. Helpful scaffolds include handouts, rubrics, acronyms, visual reminders on classroom walls, hand signals, and sentence starters.
- **Model:** Our actions should always demonstrate to students what it looks like to listen. When students speak, be sure you are really listening!
- **Embrace Silence:** Both students and teachers should be comfortable with silence! Make it a habit to pause before responding, and teach students to do the same. This practice helps minimize misunderstandings and interruptions, gives listeners time to process what they have heard, and allows speakers time to elaborate on their ideas if needed.
- **Check for Understanding:** Help students synthesize their learning by periodically checking for understanding. You might ask students to respond through a one-minute write in which they share what they heard, or invite students to share their thoughts through the use of hand signals (thumbs up, thumbs down, holding up fingers to indicate if they agree with a statement, etc.).

Empathy Across The Curriculum

Engage students in discussions about the perspectives, feelings, and experiences that surround concepts from your curriculum. Encourage students to put themselves in the shoes of the people you study.

- Use books to spark discussions about social awareness. Children and young adult literature is full of stories that connect to empathy, understanding, and inclusion. These reading experiences offer a great way to teach and model important curricular skills, while also addressing SEL concepts. Don't shy away from reading aloud to older students. Even "big kids" enjoy a read aloud! Picture books can be used with students of all ages to make difficult topics more accessible, share essential content, and scaffold higher level skills.
- Use SEL discussion cards to spark conversation and help students learn empathy:
  - SEL Question Cards: English Language Arts
  - SEL Question Cards: Social Sciences
- Connect the concept of circles to your curriculum. For example, have students consider the circles that historical figures had (...or should have had!). Discuss with students: How did these relationships shape history?
- Use concentric circles to map out relationships between characters in the books they read. Discuss with students: How did these connections impact the storyline?

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