# Favorite Prompts: Icebreakers and other engaging questions

As part of a session presented at the 2023 ARSL Annual Conference, *Libraries as Social Connectors: Strategies for Deepening Community Engagement*, we gathered these prompt and icebreaker ideas from conference attendees. See additional resources from the session in the article, [WebJunction at the Association for Rural & Small Libraries Conference](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/webjunction-arsl-2023.html).

## Things to remember when picking prompts to use

* Is it age-appropriate?
* Is the question too personal, or does it introduce cultural assumptions or sensitivities? Does the question allow for diverse perspectives and experiences?
* Does your chosen question assume privilege? E.g., asking “What was you first car, make and model?” implies that people had a car, learned to drive, and aren’t embarrassed about it.
* Is there an option to provide the question ahead of time, so those who don’t like to be surprised or put on the spot can better prepare?
* Does the question create deeper social connection, if that’s your intention?

This list collects favorite prompts or icebreakers that could be used to deepen social connection when you gather for any occasion, whether in patron interactions, for a library program, teen advisory board meeting, staff or trustee meeting, or even in more passive scenarios, like a bulletin board, inviting patrons to answer the “Question of the Week.”

## Icebreakers and other prompts

* If you could choose a superpower, what would it be and why?
* If you could go anywhere and eat anything, where would you go and what would you eat?
* What would be your theme song or walk-up song?
* What’s your go-to karaoke song?
* What’s the first concert you attended?
* If your life was made into a movie, who would play you?
* When you were a child, what was the first thing you wanted to be when you grew up?
* If you could have dinner with anyone, who would you choose?
* If you were an animal, what would it be and why?
* Two truths and a lie (each person tells two truths and a lie about themselves, and others have to guess which one is a lie).
* If you were a tree, what kind would you be, and why?
* What’s something you’ve waited a long time for? (Good with teens!)

## For interactions with patrons in the library or at the service desk

* What brings you to the library?
* What brings you to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(name of your town)? Good for folks who look like they’re new to the library or passing through.

## Book-related

* What book have you enjoyed lately/what are you reading?
* What is a book you've given as a gift repeatedly and why? (Good for adults.)

## What’s your favorite…

* What is your favorite thing about yourself?
* What is your favorite soup?
* What’s your favorite season and why?
* What is your favorite movie?
* What’s your favorite restaurant near the library?
* Share a favorite quote.

## Role-playing options

* Here's a prompt that could be used with staff, perhaps at a meeting/part of training, or with trustees and other library advocates: "What do you say to someone who says they don't like to read?" It could be someone saying they don't really use the library because they don't like to read. Staff or trustees could surface many ideas and angles! (e.g., do they know about your coffee table/oversized books, graphic novels, or do they know about all the other things they can do at the library?)
* You’re in a local store and you hear someone in the next aisle or nearby talking about the library negatively. What would you do?

## Good for staff, trustees or library boards

* What would you do if someone told you you had the day off right now?
* Describe your workday in 5 words
* What brings you awe?
* What brings you joy today?
* For our all-staff training day last year our icebreaker was: if libraries weren't an option, what is your trivia team specialty?
* Talk about something you’re proud of working on.
* Most memorable or “aha” moment in your life.
* We have a bi-monthly Conversation Starter that is shared with all the staff in in our library via Google Docs. My favorite prompt: If you could replace the cast of one movie with Muppets (except for one human character), what movie would it be and who would be the only human cast member - must be of the original cast. Think “A Christmas Carol” with Sir Michael Cane.”
* What’s one of your hobbies outside of work?
* What work skill are you particularly proud to have?
* What date on your calendar are you looking forward to?
* What’s something boring about you?
* Would you rather \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
* What professional development activity has helped most in your career?
* People Bingo Cards with relevant facts to the group
* What is: something good; something challenging; something you’ve been looking forward to?

## Questions to send out before (give them time to think about it!)

* If you could be in any band, regardless of skill or talent, which band would you be in?
* Name a fictional character you’ve been told you’re like.
* What fictional world would you like to live in and why?

## Passive or self-led engagement. Consider creating a table or space just for:

* Legos
* Bubbles
* Chalk
* Puzzles
* Coloring books

## Prompts that work well for bulletin boards

* What’s your favorite program at the library?
* Who’s the better vampire (using Twilight vs. Lost Boys vampires, perhaps even a bracket!)?

## For virtual and online meetings or gatherings

* Share three things: Where you are, what room you’re in, and a sound “off stage.”
* Find an object within arm’s length to share that tells us something about you.

## Additional ideas

* [Icebreakers that Rock: 3 No-Cheese Activities that Won't Embarrass Students](https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/classroom-icebreakers/), Cult of Pedagogy
* [Icebreakers, Energizers, Team-Building, Storytelling, and Warm-up Activities](https://ingenaes.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/ING-Activity-Sheet-2016_06-Energizers-and-group-games-Henderson-1.pdf) (pdf), Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services
* [Getting started with icebreakers](https://teaching.cornell.edu/getting-started-icebreakers), Center for Teaching Innovation, Cornell University