**Student Led Discussion of All Shapes and Sizes**

**Kinesthetic Small Group Discussions**

*These activities get students moving around the classroom and answering teacher or student written questions in a variety of ways.*

1. Structured Controversy
2. Carousel
3. Pod Discussion
4. Graffiti
5. Round Robin Questioning
6. Are you more like… than…?
7. Written conversations

**Divided Discussions**

*These discussions involve cutting the class in half, so students get the feel of a large group discussion without the intimidating factor of speaking to the entire class. These are good at the beginning of the year when establishing protocol for whole class discussions or if you have a large class in which a whole class discussions would be not be effective.*

1. Double Discussion
2. Fishbowl Discussion

**Whole Class Discussion – a.k.a. Socratic Seminars – a.k.a Paideia**

*These discussions bring the whole class together to discuss important aspect of a text or issue. I find these work best when students write the questions themselves or have some say in what questions they discuss. Students follow the teacher’s protocol, but run the discussion themselves, as the teacher sits in as an equal member of the group, following the same rules as the students.*

1. Graded Discussion
2. Guided Debate

## Structured Controversy

## This activity can be used to jump start a class as a break during lectures, during in-class readings, etc… This timed format allows students to practice speaking and refuting ideas on the spot and listening attentively.

Time these activities and encourage students to talk throughout the allotted time. Be firm in making them stop when their time is up—this supports equity in the controversy.

* Present students with binary opposites:
  + sides to a debatable topics
  + differing literary lenses
  + discussions between foils
  + opinions from stylistically different writers
* Time talking parts so students listen and talk once, twice, or three times: sharing sides & refuting 🡪 Alter time and talking opportunities based on topic and importance

## Carousel Activity

This activity helps students take perspectives, write good questions, and depict important information. This is helpful when you want students to compare or contrast two ideas, people, issues, written pieces, etc...

Hang large paper around the room, each with one of the six questions you want the students to address. (I usually have them review the reading material and six questions for homework; then they can use their homework to complete the activity.)

Put the following directions on the overhead/projector—uncover the steps as students change stations.

Each group starts at a carousel station with colored markers, write your names at the first station only—carry these markers with you to each station. (Teachers can then see what group wrote which responses.)

Each group gets 5 minutes at each station to answer the question the way they are instructed:

1. Answer the question from the perspective of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Answer the question from the perspective of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Ask a “probing” question based on the information.
4. Answer the probing question.
5. Draw an image or symbol that depicts what you feel is the most important information or idea above.
6. Summarize the above information in one profound statement and be prepared to share your thinking and poster with the class.

To end, have each group explain the thinking behind their “profound statement.”

Pod Discussion

For this, set up questions around room in the same manner as the Carousel.

This is similar to the Carousel, in that students tackle a number of big thinking questions, but instead of answering in a different manner, **they respond with a different opinion at every station**.

The questions for this activity need to be open-ended, debatable questions that allow for a variety of responses.

When students switch stations, they need to read the question and all the responses carefully, then they answer with a new opinion or perspective. Often students need to be reminded to look at as many sides to the debate as possible, and that it is okay to play the “devil’s advocate” and respond in a way with which they do not necessarily agree.

Because answering in this manner gets harder every time students switch stations, you may want to allow for more time for responses at the end of this activity.

“Graffiti” Activity

For this, set up questions around room in the same manner as the Carousel.

This is a good brainstorming activity when you want students to look at the parts of a whole, or small pieces of information/text.

Each station has a different term/idea/poem/issue/etc… and students simply brainstorm in a written, visual, and/or web-like manner.

End by students teaching the material on their sheet to the class, based on what they understand from the “graffiti.” After this, I usually allow time to “graze the graffiti” and let students “steal” their peers’ ideas—so they walk around the circle again and jot down the best pieces of information on their own notes.

Are you more like a trunk, a branch, or a leaf?

This activity can be done by comparing 2, 3, or 4 items. It forces metaphorical thinking and community building. And, it’s fun!

Post signs around the room and tell student they have 20 seconds to decide what they are more like, then move to that location. You will need to make the distinction here, not what do you *like more*, but what are you *more like.*

Have student discuss their reasoning with their group and have each group share its best couple responses. This is a fun way to begin a class, get students thinking about key terms and/or divide students into groups as well.

I usually begin with goofy ones--are you more like ice cream, cake, or Jello? Are you more like a wok, and oven, or a toaster? Are you more like a skateboard, bus, or airplane?—then end with a class-related one—are you more like a philosopher, novelist, or orator?

You can buy a whole book of these comparisons through **boomerangproject.com**, as well as a number of other *really good* team building and leadership activity books. This particular idea is used as part of the “Link Crew” student leadership/mentoring program.

Round-Robin Questioning

To elicit more student led discussion, I usually employ this technique after small group work. A simple thing I do after small groups present is have the other groups ask questions of presenting groups. Groups are then accountable as listeners and as presenters.

Once a small group is done presenting the assigned small group in the audience must ask anywhere from 1-4 questions. After they are finished other groups have a chance to ask. After all questions have been asked, if I still have questions, I get a chance—BUT usually students ask the questions that I would have!

I just put this simple reminder on the board:

Group 1 asks group 2

Group 2 asks group 3

Group 3 asks group 4

Group 4 asks group 5

Group 5 asks group 1 and so on…

Written Conversations

I am not sure where these actually fit in, but they are fun and can be used as a warm-up, during, or after a lecture, or at the end of a class or class discussion.

Supply students with a debatable questions or a class problem/issue. Have them write about it then pass to their neighbor, that neighbor responds, then passes to the next neighbor show also responds. At this point I have the fourth person read all and share the best idea with the class.

This is a great way to get every student to write and every student to talk. Even reluctant speakers feel comfortable sharing *someone else’s* idea.

Student Leaders and Rules

Before a divided or whole class discussion, choose some students leaders to run the show.

**Discussion Leader:** Keeps students on track; determines if the group has talked-out the question; invites in new voices. Reads the question to the class and either answers the questions first and/or calls on the first person to speak. (This person can change with each question or can remain the same throughout. I usually choose quiet voices for this.)

**Timekeeper:** With a stop watch the student should time the discussion of each question and let group know when question discussion time has run out. (I usually choose a loudmouth for this so the student won’t feel bad butting in.) Even the juiciest of questions with the smarter of students usually gets “talked-out” around 15-20 minutes!

**Graded Discussion Rules:**

1. Keep the discussion/debate text-based, cite specific examples & quotations.
2. *Call on the next person. – as a class decide on how this is done…*
3. Look to invite new voices to speak.
4. Listen to what people say and respond to the idea at hand.
5. Direct counter-arguments at ideas, not people.
6. Do not dominate conversation (especially with back and forth banter).

During discussion I have toyed with a number of ways for students to call on each other and help them see who has and has not spoken. These tactics have worked to varying degrees based on the given group and ages of students. I have had them:

* raise hands or pens
* raise/hold neon card until they have spoken twice
* hold up fingers showing how many times they have spoken
* made them call on the opposite gender for the next speaker
* Throw a soft ball or toy to the next speaker (my favorite was my “owl of wisdom”)
* simply chime in when they can – good for older kids in smaller classes

Double Discussion

**Advantages:**

* These discussions involve cutting the class in half, so students get the feel of a large group, student-led discussion without the intimidating factor of speaking to the entire class.
* These are good at the beginning of the year when establishing protocol for whole class discussions—I always do 2-3 double discussions before a formal graded discussion to establish and practice discussion rules.
* If you have a large class in which a whole class discussions would be not be effective, this allows students more “air time.”
* They work well when you have two big items or bodies of information to cover and want to do so in an efficient manner.
* This forum also limits teacher intrusion, as one cannot be in two places at once, serving as a good reminder to zip your mouth and the let students figure “it” out.

**Disadvantages:**

* It is not as easy to monitor student behavior and discussion.
* Assessing discussion quality and student behavior can be tricky.

**Directions:**

1. Divide class in half.
2. Present each half with a different task or different material to discuss.
3. Allow them time to discuss the material.
4. Each side should create a visual aide of some type to help in teaching and note taking.
5. Allow time enough at the end for each group to share/teach information to the other half. **How** to do this:

* Can be done as a presentation from one group to the other – I have done this when both big groups are tackling the same information.
* Or, you can put students in pairs or quads (one or two from each side), and have couples teach each other, so the dissemination of information in more thorough – I would do this for more important information or when each side is working on something different.
  + It’s like another form of the jig-saw method.
  + This means that every student needs to be fully engaged so they can individually teach someone else

1. Make sure both halves have a something on which to take notes as they learn from the other half.

Fishbowl Discussion – a.k.a. A Circle Within a Circle

**Advantages:**

* This helps students become better listeners.
* I found this works well with younger students especially.
* This always works well when you have a larger class and still want to have a large group discussion.
* You cut the size of the discussion but still can formally assess the students—unlike a double discussion when they both happen at the same time.
* Students get feedback from peers and teacher—this paired with a good reflection about their own participation can be very helpful for those who are too dominant or too quiet.
* Teachers of writing often do peer edits, but we rarely offer opportunities for peer feedback on oral work—what a great chance!
* If you have a number of questions you want the students to discuss.

**Disadvantages:**

* Students get squirmy, just sitting and listening.
* Often those on the outside want to chime in!

**Directions:**

* 1. Give students questions to address before the discussion as homework. (I usually like to stick with six questions—each circle discusses three.)
  2. On the day of the Fishbowl, arrange desks in two concentric circles.
  3. When students enter the class the day of the Fishbowl, have them partner up. (For the first time we do this I always let them choose their own partner, after that I partner them randomly.)
  4. Have partners choose who will be “A” and who will be “B.”
  5. Send A to the middle ring, to be inside the fishbowl, send B to sit directly behind their partner on the outside.
  6. Partner B gets the rubric and should fill it out as the discussion ensues.
  7. Discussion Leader picks questions randomly—this way all students have prepared for all questions, but only discuss half.
  8. Halfway through discussion questions, students switch, and A goes to outside and B goes to the inside to finish the discussion questions.
  9. At this point, B gives A the rubric. Note: the comments on these are mandatory!
     + This reversal can indeed be tricky, especially with younger students.
     + BUT, getting them up and moving half way through is a good thing and it’s a good time for a high five or handshake.
     + You can do this over two days too!
  10. I take notes on the students’ ideas and participation.
  11. Collect student rubrics and prep notes at the end of the discussion.

Fishbowl Rubric and Reflection *(short version)*

ROUND ONE: Student B: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Observing: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Score your partner on the following items. For each item, you must justify your score with written comments. Complete this as you listen to the discussion. When it is time to switch, your rubric should be complete.

4 = Exemplary! One of the best in the discussion! 3 = Well done! Met the expectation! 2 = Fine work, could use some improvement, work on this area next time 1 = Needs more, *really* work on this area!

1. Partner kept the discussion/debate text-based, s/he cited specific examples & quotations: 4 3 2 1
2. Partner made many insightful, interesting, and/or positive comments and used appropriate speech and tone for English class: 4 3 2 1

*Maybe write and example of an idea you liked:*

1. Partner called on the next person & looked to invite new voices to speak:

4 3 2 1

1. Partner clearly listened, stayed on task, and made a sincere attempt to participate, but did not dominate conversation: 4 3 2 1

ROUND TWO: Student A: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Observing: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Score your partner on the following items. For each item, you must justify your score with written comments. Complete this as you listen to the discussion. When it is time to switch, your rubric should be complete.

4 = Exemplary! One of the best in the discussion! 3 = Well done! Met the expectation! 2 = Fine work, could use some improvement, work on this area next time 1 = Needs more, *really* work on this area!

1. Partner kept the discussion/debate text-based, s/he cited specific examples & quotations: 4 3 2 1
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*Maybe write and example of an idea you liked:*

1. Partner called on the next person & looked to invite new voices to speak:

4 3 2 1

1. Partner clearly listened, stayed on task, and made a sincere attempt to participate, but did not dominate conversation: 4 3 2 1

Graded Discussion

This is a formal discussion in which all students sit in a circle and follow the discussion protocol. I usually stick to three big questions per discussion.

Directions:

1. Students complete the questions for homework before the discussion and they bring these prep notes with them to class, to be collected at the end of the discussion.
2. All students sit in a circle together, as does the teacher.
3. Teacher hands out discussion reflection and rubric, with questions printed on back.
4. Discussion Leader reads first question and begins discussion. I have found that most teenagers can discuss a “deep thinking” question pretty well for 10-20 minutes before things get redundant or off track.
5. If teacher wants to interject, s/he must follow discussion protocol. The teacher only breaks the rules if students get inappropriate or way off track and the discussion leader does not or cannot redirect the class.
6. I take notes on the students’ ideas and participation—these become key in scoring their performance.
7. Save time at the end of class so students can fill out the reflection, at least 5-10 minutes. This usually means the last question gets cut off… that’s okay, it’s a successful discussion if students leave your class still talking about class material ☺!

**See:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God* questions, written by students for our first formal graded discussion of the year.

Guided Debate

I recently tweaked my graded discussion because my students simply came to class with prepared responses and simply “deposited” those into what became and “idea forum” instead of an *actual* discussion.

To do this, I prepared two very debatable questions and assigned students to sides. For the third question, students could choose your own side. To switch sides up after the first questions, I hand out four different sheets with varied questions. This way, the same people are not arguing against each other throughout.

Students have responded well to this style of discussion and really seem to enjoy the extra tension of a debate!

I also added tally boxes, so students could track their own comments throughout the discussion, monitor their progress, and either open or close their mouths. This has worked pretty well, but ultimately, some students will talk more and others will talk less!

**See:** this year’s *Hamlet* questions & guided debate rubric and reflection.

*Example discussion questions: Students pulled their own questions from their Dialectical Notebooks, debated which were the best questions, then voted as to which ones deserved discussion status! We did this all in class and I typed them up as the students decided and then posted them on the OLC so students could print them out and prepare. Each class had a different discussions based on student-written and student-elected questions. (I only added the teacherly parenthetical reminders!)*

2nd Period Discussion Questions

You may simply print this sheet to write/type your prep notes upon.

The best prep notes will have a variety of responses and quotes to back up your ideas. USE these during our discussion and hand them in after.

1. Is the concept of marriage a natural epiphany or a taught value? How is Janie’s epiphany of marriage comparable to the way others are “taught” marriage? After considering Janie’s views of her marriages, consider what marriage is and if should it require love to exist. Use Janie’s marriages as examples or defense. (Use quotes and examples from the text to defend your ideas whenever possible.)
2. What are Hurston’s thoughts towards God? Does she think of God as a merciful one or a vengeful one? How do her characters portray these ideas about God and death? (Use quotes and examples from the text to defend your ideas whenever possible.)
3. What is the result of abandoning one’s identity or the importance of keeping close ties with one’s roots or culture? What are the results of certain characters losing their identity or trying to be something they are not? (Use quotes and examples from the text to defend your ideas whenever possible.)
4. What is the significance of the mule (look to chapter 6) in relation to the characters in the novel? (Use quotes and examples from the text to defend your ideas whenever possible.)

AP/IB 12 Year 2: Guided Debate Rubric and Reflection

**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**This section is for the student to fill out during & after the discussion:**

1. Total number of contributions you made during the discussion: \_\_\_\_

*Add from backside tally marks!*

1. What was the best point you contributed?
2. What was one point you wanted to make, but didn’t? What kept you from making this contribution?
3. Reflect on your general contribution of ideas and participation. How do you feel you did today?
4. How can you improve next discussion?

**This section is for the teacher to fill out. Attach to the front of your prep notes!**

1. Specific reference to text/quote or another student’s idea: \_\_\_\_\_ / 3
2. Overall quality and insight of contributions to discussion: \_\_\_\_\_ / 3
3. Sincerity to participate & allow others to speak throughout discussion: \_\_\_\_ / 3
4. Detailed and honest reflection on participation: \_\_\_\_\_ / 3
5. Thoughtful prep notes with quotes/page numbers: \_\_\_\_\_ / 3 Total: \_\_\_\_\_ / 15

Debate Questions: Both Sides!

A. The characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have become quite famous in the past few decades thanks to a play written by Tom Stoppard entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.* Consider what we know about these characters from their interactions with Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude. What is their function in the play? Are there any distinction made between the two, or do they act as entirely one entity? What qualities do they display? Are they even important? Note that they are often first to be cut from the plot when modern directors are trying to fit this long play into a two hour production for today’s audiences. **Argue as a director who wants to cut them from his production and explain to the other actors of your production why you must cut them? Use quotations and examples from the play to support your answer.**

Tally # of contributions for this ? Use this info. to open or close your mouth!

B. Does Hamlet change from the beginning of the play to the end? Consider, for example, how and why he finally exacts his father’s revenge on Claudius. Is this action premeditated or was he forced into it? Does the fact that Hamlet finally accomplishes his goal indicate a significant transformation of his personality? **Argue that Hamlet has “come to age” and “achieved knowledge” by the end of the play. Explain how and when this transformation occurs. Use quotations and examples from the play to support your answer.**

Tally # of contributions for this ? Use this info. to open or close your mouth!

C. Craft your own argument: Through Hamlet, you can view many of the character’s actions as based on choice (free will) or based on fate (destiny). Which of Hamlet’s actions come from free will? Which come from destiny? What about the actions of Ophelia? Claudius? Gertrude? What relationship between free will and destiny does Shakespeare suggest? How does this relationship connect with the classic tragic hero? What can we, as a modern audience, learn from Hamlet’s actions, regardless of his choice or destiny?

Comment Tally:

AA. The characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have become quite famous in the past few decades thanks to a play written by Tom Stoppard entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.* Consider what we know about these characters from their interactions with Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude. What is their function in the play? Are there any distinction made between the two, or do they act as entirely one entity? What qualities do they display? Are they even important? Note that they are often first to be cut from the plot when modern directors are trying to fit this long play into a two hour production for today’s audiences. **Argue as an actor playing Hamlet or Claudius who does not want to cut them from their production. Explain why R & G are essential to their roles in the play and why the director should keep their parts? Use quotations and examples from the play to support your answer.**

Tally # of contributions for this ? Use this info. to open or close your mouth!

BB. Does Hamlet change from the beginning of the play to the end? Consider, for example, how and why he finally exacts his father’s revenge on Claudius. Is this action premeditated or was he forced into it? Does the fact that Hamlet finally accomplishes his goal indicate a significant transformation of his personality? **Argue that Hamlet has NOT “come to age” nor has he achieved any real “knowledge” by the end of the play. Explain what stymies his transformation from occurring. Use quotations and examples from the play to support your answer.**

Tally # of contributions for this ? Use this info. to open or close your mouth!