

Background

It has been said that the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. Therefore, each student will be responsible for leading one 25-minute or longer discussion on some part of a work of literature that we are reading, usually a specific chapter, short story, or essay. By late September, I will begin signing up students for this graded assignment. Everyone must lead at least one discussion by late May.

Directions

Your main goal of this assignment is to orchestrate a rich, fruitful discussion. Therefore, you will have to read the chosen selection and come up with a list of provocative questions to help guide, nurture, and stimulate the conversation of your classmates. Keep in mind that just because you are “in charge” does not mean that you have to display your opinions or insights; your aim is to be a catalyst for the learning of your classmates.

On the specified day, you will sit (or stand, if you prefer) in the front of the class with your questions in hand and lead the exchange. I will be at the back of the classroom and take notes on your discussion and where it leads. I will raise my hand and wait my turn just like everyone else if I wish to add something into your discussion. As a last note, I will require a copy of your questions before you begin leading your discussion.

Some Advice

You will deal with the same issues I face every day, such as students who have not read or who are confused by the reading. How you help these students and lead your discussion is entirely up to you. Keep in mind you are encouraged to use the same tools that I do, such as Rally / Round Robin, Quick Writes, Hands Up/Pair Up, Partner Sharing, etc.

As for the questions you can ask, some students prefer to throw wide-open questions, such as “What did you think of last night’s reading?” While there is nothing wrong with such a question, keep in mind that you will likely get a variety of responses, which might easily get the students off on tangents not connected to the book. You might want to consider narrowing your focus, with questions such as “What was your response to the situation on pg. 73...can I get a volunteer to read the last few lines of this character to see what we all think?” Some students like to throw out their opinions, such as “This character is an awful stereotype for women...what do you think?” to provoke a strong reaction from the audience. Still, others like to throw out questions related to the criticisms we’ve been studying, such as “We’ve been talking about the heroic quest a lot in this class...do you think the action that he did on pg. 63 strengthens or weakens him as a hero figure?” Additionally, sometimes it’s helpful to ask students to defend their choices, such as “Tim, you say the author’s writing is weak...can you or anyone else give me specific examples that support your idea?” Ask people to give reasons for their opinions and to defend their comments with evidence from the text.

Every discussion leader has problems in recognizing people to speak, especially in a very vocal group. Figure out your own method; if calling on people with their hands up works, try to get a sense of who has had their hand up the longest...don’t just call on people you know or like. Sometimes problems arise when participants become disrespectful. Don’t let people interrupt (Rule #3) others and point out errors of fact (“Actually, the main character’s name is June, not Randy.”)

Once the conversation starts, let it go where it will. If things are going along nicely, you may hear reactions to human issues, comments on the writer’s craft, connections to other works of literature, personal experiences, and more. In a good conversation, students will analyze, judge, disagree, defend, compare, gain new insights, and astound you with their ideas.

In whatever way you decide to proceed, you need to have a lot of questions. Every teacher’s (and discussion leader’s) nightmare is throwing out a great question that is met with deathly silence by the class. Don’t worry...it happens to all of us! Make sure you give the class enough “wait time” to think and process your question—sometimes upwards of 30 to 45 seconds. If the class is still silent, feel free to try on another question.

“Leading Discussion” Assignment (AICE Language Only)

Mr. Hampton, 2011-2012

How You Are Graded

See the rubric below for more specific information on how you will be graded. Keep in mind, grades will be applied to your final 4th quarter grade only.

	A	B	C	F
Question List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student has prepared an extensive list of questions to help guide class discussion. Questions are analytical and can be answered in a variety of ways. Student turns in an extra copy of these questions to the teacher <u>before</u> the discussion begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student has prepared a good list of questions to help guide class discussion. Some questions are too factual and can only be answered in one way. Student turns in an extra copy of these questions to the teacher <u>before</u> the discussion begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student has prepared a few questions, but not enough to lead the class in a full 25-minute discussion. Most questions are factual and can only be answered in one way. Student turns in an extra copy of these questions to the teacher <u>before</u> the discussion begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student has failed to prepare a list of questions. Student does not hand in a copy of these questions to the teacher before discussion begins.
Discussion Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are highly engaged and motivated by questions. A great variety of discussion methods are used (Rally Robin, etc.) Discussion leader guides and does not dominate discussion. Discussion is democratic, with the discussion leader promoting multiple viewpoints among students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are mostly engaged and motivated by questions. A good variety of discussion methods are used (Rally Robin, etc.) Discussion leader begins to dominate conversation. Discussion is mostly democratic, but discussion leader occasionally “shoots down” other viewpoints among students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students seem disengaged and unmotivated by questions. Discussion method is primarily leader asks, student responds. Discussion leader tends to dominate conversation. Discussion is not democratic. The discussion leader tends to “shoot down” other viewpoints among students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are mostly disengaged by the questions. Discussion method is primarily leader asks, leader responds. Discussion is not democratic. The discussion leader refuses to acknowledge other viewpoints among students.
Facilitation Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion leader is clear and understandable when asking questions. Discussion leader provides good “wait time.” Discussion leader makes good eye contact with the class. Discussion leader is an active listener and paraphrases / summarizes other responses and re-directs questions accordingly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion leader is mostly clear and understandable, but may read questions too fast. Discussion leader provides “wait time,” but may move onto new questions too fast. Discussion leader makes good eye contact with some students, but may neglect others. Discussion leader does a good job at listening, but may move on to another question too quickly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion leader tends to read questions too fast for students to process. Discussion leader tends to not provide enough “wait time” for the questions. Discussion leader rarely makes eye contact with students. Discussion leader tends to ask a question and as soon as a student responds, moves onto the next question without acknowledging that student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion leader reads questions too fast. Discussion leader does not provide any “wait time” for students. Discussion leader never makes eye contact with students. Discussion leader asks questions one after another without any acknowledgement of the student’s response.

A Checklist

- ☐ Your name, the date and topic of the discussion at the top of your paper
- ☐ Make two copies of your questions:
 - ☐ Give one copy to Hampton and keep the other for your discussion.
- ☐ Include many analytical questions that can be answered in a variety of ways
- ☐ Use a variety of strategies, such as Rally Robin, Quick Writes, Partner Shares, etc.
- ☐ Keep discussion democratic; do not dominate the conversation or let student’s interrupt.
- ☐ Make sure to: provide enough “wait time,” make good eye contact, build off of one student’s response to help the discussion move forward.