



## ELA Grades 6-12 Standard 3 Activities

### Effects of Motivation on Learning Styles

1. **Deep learners** respond well to the challenge of mastering a difficult and complex subject. These are intrinsically motivated students who are often a joy to teach!
2. **Strategic learners** are motivated primarily by rewards. They react well to competition and the opportunity to best others. They often make good grades but won't engage deeply with a subject unless there is a clear reward for doing so. They are sometimes called "bulimic learners," learning as much as they need to do well on a test or exam and then promptly forgetting the material once the assessment is over.
3. **Surface learners** are often motivated by a desire to avoid failure. They typically avoid deep learning because they see it as inherently risky behavior. They will often do what it takes to pass an exam or course, but they won't choose to go beyond the minimum required for fear of failure.
  - Handle strategic learners by avoiding appeals to competition. Appeal to their intrinsic interest in the subject at hand. Design your assignments (tests, papers, projects, etc.) so that deep engagement with the subject is necessary for success on the assignments. Do so by requiring students to apply, synthesize, or evaluate material instead of merely comprehending or memorizing material.
  - Handle surface learners by helping them gain confidence in their abilities to learn and perform. "Scaffold" course material and assignments by designing a series of activities or assignments that build on each other over time in complexity and challenge. Encourage these learners often and help them reflect on what they've learned and what they've accomplished.

Source: Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Harvard University Press, 2004, pages 40-41.

### A Model of Intrinsic Motivation.

First, given the opportunity to engage in a learning activity, a student determines if the activity is one that is known to be **interesting**. If so, the student engages in the activity.

If not, then the student evaluates the activity on two factors—the **stimulation** (e.g. challenge, curiosity, fantasy) it provides and the **personal control** (e.g. free choice, not too difficult) it affords.



If the student perceives the activity as stimulating and controllable, then the student tentatively labels the activity as interesting and engages in it. If either condition becomes insufficient, then the student disengages from the activity—unless some extrinsic motivator influences the student to continue.

If the activity is repeatedly deemed stimulating and controllable, then the student may deem the activity interesting. Then the student will be more likely to engage in the activity in the future.

If over time, activities that are deemed interesting provide little stimulation or control, then the student will remove the activity from his or her mental list of interesting activities.

*The challenge, then, is to provide teaching and learning activities that are both stimulating and offer students a degree of personal control.*

*Source: James A. Middleton, "A Study of Intrinsic Motivation in the Mathematics Classroom: A Personal Constructs Approach," Journal for Research in Mathematics Education, Vol. 26, No. 3, pages 255-257.*

## Strategies for Motivating Students

Following are some research-based strategies for motivating students to learn.

- **Become a role model for student interest.** Deliver your presentations with energy and enthusiasm. As a display of your motivation, your passion motivates your students. Make the course personal, showing why you are interested in the material.
- **Get to know your students.** You will be able to better tailor your instruction to the students' concerns and backgrounds, and your personal interest in them will inspire their personal loyalty to you. Display a strong interest in students' learning and a faith in their abilities.
- **Use examples freely.** Many students want to be shown why a concept or technique is useful before they want to study it further. Inform students about how your course prepares students for future opportunities.
- **Use a variety of student-active teaching activities.** These activities directly engage students in the material and give them opportunities to achieve a level of mastery.
  - Teach by discovery. Students find as satisfying as reasoning through a problem and discovering the underlying principle on their own.
  - Cooperative learning activities are particularly effective as they also provide positive social pressure.
- **Set realistic performance goals** and help students achieve them by encouraging them to set their own reasonable goals. Design assignments that are appropriately challenging in view of the experience and aptitude of the class.



- **Place appropriate emphasis on testing and grading.** Tests should be a means of showing what students have mastered, not what they have not. Avoid grading on the curve and give everyone the opportunity to achieve the highest standard and grades.
- **Be free with praise and constructive in criticism.** Negative comments should pertain to particular performances, not the performer. Offer nonjudgmental feedback on students' work, stress opportunities to improve, look for ways to stimulate advancement, and avoid dividing students into sheep and goats.
- **Give students as much control over their own education as possible.** Let students choose paper and project topics that interest them. Assess them in a variety of ways (tests, papers, projects, presentations, etc.) to give students more control over how they show their understanding to you. Give students options for how these assignments are weighted.

Sources:

- Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Harvard University Press, 2004, pages 32-42.
- Linda Nilson, *Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*, 2nd edition, Anker Publishing, 2003, pages 41-44.
- Matt DeLong and Dale Winter, *Learning to Teaching and Teaching to Learn Mathematics: Resources for Professional Development*, Mathematical Association of America, 2002, pages 159-168.

### Showing Students the Appeal of the Subject

When encouraging students to find your subject matter interesting, use cues to show students the appeal of the subject matter.

<i>Appeal</i>	<i>Examples of Cues</i>
Novelty	"I think that is really neat—I haven't seen anything quite the same."
Utility	"This next topic is something that we'll use again and again. It contains valuable ideas that we'll use throughout the later sections of the course."
Applicability	"As you work through the next section, I think that you'll be pleasantly surprised how relevant it is."
Anticipation	"As you read through, ask yourself what this section of work is hinting at as the next logical step."
Surprise	"We've used <i>X</i> in a lot of different ways. If you thought you'd seen them all, just wait for the next assignment."
Challenge	"Who's up for a challenge? I think that you'll find the next piece of work very



	interesting."
Feedback	"When you try this, you'll find out whether you really understood yesterday's lesson."
Closure	"A lot of you have asked me about X. Well, finally we're going to find out why that's so."

Source: Matt DeLong and Dale Winter, *Learning to Teaching and Teaching to Learn Mathematics: Resources for Professional Development*, Mathematical Association of America, 2002, page 168.

## Activity Speaks Louder Than Words: Improving Student Engagement

Think about the level of cognitive engagement that occurs with each activity in this list:

- Watching/listening
- Notetaking
- Notemaking
- Discussing
- Summarizing

The learning style of your students plays a key role with things like "watching/listening." For example, I realize as I get older that I am definitely a visual learner. I often can't remember a name until I see it in print. So, it would not benefit *me* as much to be in an environment where most learning occurs through listening. Teacher-led instruction and discussion have a place in the classroom. But if students are only listening to their teacher present without having something that they must also be doing, how much cognitive demand or even memory retention is taking place?

Here's a personal example of how learning can benefit from this cognitive demand. After my wife and I see a movie, we have our debriefing, a conversation that's always interesting because each often sees things the other person didn't see. We analyze and evaluate what we saw right away. If one of us wasn't sure why something occurred, the other will often give clarification. After these conversations, we gain new insight into the movie we both just experienced. If I had



watched the movie alone or had no discussion, I would have gained far less than I did from watching it with her.

Imagine the power of this exchange of ideas with students in your classroom. Yes, they can hear what is being told to them. But the real learning comes through interaction with their newly acquired knowledge.

### **The Down Side of Down Time**

As teachers, we lead classrooms filled with learners of all styles. It is imperative that we use methods that will engage students at all times. When we don't, the result is a student sitting there not learning -- in essence, doing nothing.

The rule of thumb is simple. As you plan your lesson, think: **no down time**. At all times, all students must be doing something significant toward the instructional goal, even during any full group discussions.

Here are some instances where down time happens:

- The teacher is asking specific "popcorn" type questions of one student at a time in a whole-group setting -- *what are the other students doing?*
- Students are at the board working a problem or writing an answer -- *what are the other students doing?*
- The teacher is introducing a new topic, method or concept of which students may not have much prior knowledge -- *are all students equally engaged?*

### **Strategies for Engagement**

How can you ensure that *all students* are engaged during whole-group discussions?

- **Evaluation:** Have students assess before and after an individual response. Before the response, you might prompt them with "Who thinks they know the answer?" or "Alright, listen closely and see if you agree." After the response, you could ask, "Is that correct?" or "Do you agree?"
- **Questioning:** Keep them thinking, inquiring and wondering.
- **Surveying:** As opposed to asking one student, ask everyone the same question. This may require more of a multiple-choice method: "Which one do you believe is correct? Why?"



- **Individual white boards:** Again, as opposed to asking one person, ask everyone to write and display an answer. This is a great way to ensure everyone is thinking about the topic; it's also great formative assessment.
- **Call and response:** Having students repeat, chant, sing or choral read is a high-energy way to engage everyone.
- **Find a core:** Build a lesson or presentation around a problem, issue or situation that's likely to engage all students.
- **Peer discussion:** Rather than asking one student a question, have students discuss the problem, issue or situation while you monitor the accuracy of their discussion.
- **Building schema:** How can real life be applied to this discussion? What connections can be made? Have students discuss this as a class or with a partner.
- **Guided lessons or scavenger hunts:** Have students look for or find certain pieces of information in order to synthesize meaning at the end. This could be as simple as fill-in-the-blanks notes, guided questions throughout the lesson, or actual built-in clues that kids have to figure out to construct meaning.
- **Notemaking:** Give students the opportunity to synthesize their thoughts in a meaningful way to build understanding. Use a graphic organizer to help them put thoughts together and build meaning as new information is presented. (This method requires a lot of upfront teaching and modeling.)
- **Divide and conquer:** Assigning students to small groups or stations can help eliminate idle time, as any quick mini-lesson would be focused in a small-group setting while others are doing meaningful tasks.
- **Eliminate whole-group discussions:** Before entering into such an experience, ask yourself if there's a better way for students to use an inductive or more inquiry-based experience to gain the same knowledge in a more meaningful way.

## Making It Stick

It is imperative that students are **interacting** with new learning. If we really want new learning to "stick," students must be **doing**. Real learning is not a spectator sport.

The work of education is difficult, but we must try to keep students cognitively engaged. It begins with gaining and keeping their attention and interest. Once we have that attention and interest, what we do with it will make the difference with reaching our instructional goals.



## Deeper Learning: A Collaborative Classroom Is Key

What's ideal when it comes to collaboration in our classrooms? Here's one coveted scenario: several children gathered at a table engaged in a high-level task, discussing, possibly debating an issue, making shared decisions, and designing a product that demonstrates all this deeper learning.

As teachers, we'd love to see this right out the gate, but this sort of sophisticated teamwork takes scaffolding. It won't just happen by placing students together with a piece of provocative text or an engaging task. (Heck, this deeper learning collaboration is challenging for most adults!)

In preparing our students for college and careers, 21st century skills call on us to develop highly collaborative citizens -- it's one of [the 4 Cs](#), after all. So how do we begin this scaffolded journey? Once we've shared with students the task or assessment they are challenged to complete with their group, here's some suggested steps for supporting students in deep and meaningful collaboration:

### Establish Group Agreements

Deciding on group norms, or agreements, right at the get go will give each student a voice and provide accountability for all. Although the Center for Adaptive Schools' [Seven Norms of Collaboration](#) (see at end of article) are to be used with adult groups, use them to inspire more "kid-friendly" worded norms to offer up to your students. Children (depending on the age) might come up with things like: "one person talks at a time," "respect each other and all ideas," and "no put downs." A poster of the shared agreements can be displayed and when necessary, called attention to when a student or group needs a reminder.

Accountability is an important factor in group working agreements. Since a teacher must find creative and effective ways to monitor multiple groups working at once in the classroom, assigning roles can be incredibly helpful. For example, if students are working in a group of four reading and analyzing an article, say, on immigration reform in the United States, you may have "an investigator," "a recorder," "a discussion director," and "a reporter." For the group to be successful, each child must complete the jobs that accompany his/her role.

### Teach Them How to Listen

Good listeners are both rare and valued in our culture. I share this with students. I also share how people who really listen (make eye contact, offer empathy, restrain from cutting others off in a conversation) are easy to like and respect.



[Save The Last Word](#) is a great activity that allows students to practice listening. Provide several rounds of this structured activity followed by time for students to reflect on the experience and evaluate their own listening skills.

Children also need opportunities to restrain themselves from speaking in order to keep their attention on listening. Consider adding "Three then Me" to the class norms/agreements. This simply means that before one can speak again, they need to wait for three others to share first.

### **Teach Them the Art of Asking Good Questions**

Have the class generate questions on any given topic, writing each one on the board. Decide on the most pressing and interesting questions of the bunch and discuss with students what makes these particular ones stand out. Talk about the types of questions that more often yield the best responses -- those that are open-ended, thoughtful and sometimes even daring.

Describe how well-received questions are neutral and don't sound as if someone is being interrogated. Introduce them to invitational questions stems such as, "When you think about \_\_\_\_\_, what comes to mind?" and, "Considering what we already know about \_\_\_\_\_, how will we \_\_\_\_?" As a scaffold, provide a handout with question starters for students to use during group discussions.

Students also need to know about wait time. Explain -- better yet, demonstrate -- that once someone in the group poses a question, there needs to be a few seconds of silence, giving everyone time to think.

### **Teach Them How To Negotiate**

A group member who speaks the loudest and frequently asserts may get the most said but that doesn't mean they'll convince a group of anything. A good negotiator listens well, shows patience and flexibility, points out shared ideas and areas of group agreement, and thinks under pressure.

After sharing this list with students, generate together more characteristics to add to it. Indulge them in a brief activity called "Build a Consensus." In this activity, set the timer and give mere minutes to group plan a mock birthday party, fieldtrip, or a lunchtime meal so they can practice their negotiation skills.

### **Model What We Expect**

When it comes to creating a highly collaborative classroom, teachers need to model listening, paraphrasing, artful questioning and negotiation any and every chance they get. In a student-



centered classroom, we really do very little actual teaching (in the traditional sense of the word). What we find ourselves mostly doing is facilitating learning experiences for whole and smaller groups. Sending our students out in the world with the incredible ability to effectively facilitate a group is a 21st century skill crucial to success in the university and the work world.

This reminds me of the design company IDEO. An employee there was promoted to guide a team in [redesigning the shopping cart](#) not because of seniority but because "he's good with groups." Ultimately, this guy was highly skilled at creating a space for all ideas to be heard, respected, and built on.

### **Group Brain Power**

Learning, and higher-level learning such as synthesizing information from several documents or analyzing scientific data, can hit much deeper when done collaboratively. Let's not forget [Lev Vygotsky](#) and his educational theory that proposes learning as a social process. And if he were alive today, he would most likely agree with the saying, *Two minds are better than one*. He might even add, "Better yet, how about three or four?"

### **Seven Norms of Collaboration by Garmston Wellman**

These norms build group energy, commitment, and effectiveness.

- Pausing. Not all brains work at the same rate or use the same processes. There are four types of pauses: 1) after a question, 2) after someone speaks, 3) personal reflection time, and 4) the collective pause (structured or spontaneous). Pausing, then paraphrasing are two steps that set up deeper types of discussion.
- Paraphrasing. To help the group be as receptive as possible, avoid using "I" as you paraphrase. Instead, try using the following openers:

*You're suggesting...*

*You're proposing...*

*So, what you're wondering is...*

*So, you are thinking that...*

Choose a logical level for your response: Acknowledge and clarify content and emotion, or structure or bring together a number of statements or issues expressed by the group, or change the level of logic by raising or lowering it.



- Probing for Specificity. Human brains form generalizations from diverse pieces of information as a matter of survival. Therefore, a special effort is needed to gain specificity, a requirement for good group communication and understanding. Clarify vague pronouns, such as the generalized "they." Use specific verbs. Find out what specific rules are behind words such as "must" and "cannot." Avoid using absolute or universal words such as *everyone, all, never, and always*.
- Putting Ideas on the Table. To present ideas in the spirit of group sharing and collaboration, try using one or more of the following openers:

*Here is an idea for consideration...*

*One possible approach...*

*This is not an advocacy, I'm just thinking out loud...*

Also know when to withdraw an idea if it is getting in the way of moving forward. Make sure, too, that the group works with data, not just impressions.

- Paying Attention to Self and Others. People have differing learning styles, so interact with them by recognizing their language and physical cues. Listen for whether group members use visual, auditory, or kinesthetic modes of thinking and expression: *I see, I hear, I feel....*
- Presuming Positive Intentions. Phrase and frame issues and concerns in positive rather than negative language.
- Pursuing a Balance Between Advocacy and Inquiry. Using both cognitive and emotional means, spend equal amounts of time "advocating for one's own ideas and inquiring into the ideas of others."

## Cooperative Learning Strategies

Adapted from Kagan's, *Cooperative Learning* and Erwin's *The Classroom of Choice*

### Carousel Brainstorming:

Place chart paper in 4 – 6 locations around the room. Each sheet has a task for students to complete, a question to answer, quote to reflect or respond to, etc. Students are placed in groups and given markers (or you can select group recorders and give markers only to them). Each group is asked to begin at a different piece of chart paper. The teacher explains the traffic flow,



showing students how they are to move around the room. A timer is set. Students begin their first task and when the timer rings, they move to the next piece of chart paper and begin the next task, adding answers or comments to the ones already recorded. Students continue to work through each station, moving each time the timer rings. Once finished, students can take a “gallery walk” and read all the responses.

This activity can be used in numerous ways: to uncover or build prior knowledge, to motivate or engage, to develop ideas for writing topics or projects, to identify ways to apply content, to solve a problem, or as a review.

### **Inside-Outside Circle:**

Students form two concentric circles with the same number of people in each circle. It’s easiest to have students count off by twos and direct the “ones” to stand in a circle. Once they have arranged themselves in a circle, ask them to turn around and face out. Direct the “twos” to face the “ones” creating an outer circle. One circle moves clockwise, the other moves counterclockwise. When the teacher says, “freeze”, both circles stop moving and students pair with the person standing across from them in the other circle. The teacher then directs them to share or discuss with their partner. After the partners have had a chance to finish their discussion, the teacher directs the circles to move again.

This strategy can be used in numerous ways:

- As an icebreaker or team builder, giving questions about personal interests, movies, etc.
- To help student discover prior knowledge about a particular topic before holding a large-group discussion or prior to teaching a lesson.
- As a drill-and-practice activity
- As a review
- As a listening exercise. Have the inner circle speak first for a minute or two about a particular topic. The outer circle can’t say anything; they just listen. Then the outer circle summarizes what their partner says. The inner circle gives feedback and they switch roles.

### **Pairs Discuss or Pairs Check:**

This activity is a great follow-up to teacher-guided practice on a particular skill. Once the teacher gives an assignment, partners take turns answering a question or doing a problem while the other partner coaches and gives feedback. Once they’ve done that two or three times, both do the work, stopping after each two or three questions or problems and checking their answers



with each other. For a variation of this activity, students can simply work in pairs to practice a skill. They work on the problem simultaneously and then check their work together, or one student may “ask” and one “answer” and then reverse roles.

**Pick a Card, Any Card:**

This activity encourages total student engagement and accountability. You will need two sets of regular planning cards. Divide the class into teams of four and give each student on each team a card of a different suit. After assigning the teams a topic (hold a discussion, brainstorm some ideas, solve a problem, etc.), pull a card at random out of the deck. The student in each group who holds the same suit as the card you pulled reports her team’s ideas or answer. Note: You can also use this strategy to assign roles. For example, hearts will be the facilitators; spades will be the recorders; diamonds will report to the class; and clubs will be in charge of materials.

**Numbered Heads:**

Each person in the group is given a number (1, 2, 3 or 4). The teacher poses a question and the teams are given time to discuss the answer. The teacher then asks student # \_\_\_\_ to stand and answer the question in front of the whole class.

**Jigsaw:**

As we all know, the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. This strategy requires students to teach other students. 1) Identify content that can be divided into relatively equal meaningful segments. 2) Identify the number of segments to be learned and place that number of students in each learning team. 3) Assign each person in the learning team a different segment of the material and give them time to study it. 4) Students then meet in expert groups (leave their original groups to discuss material with other students who have the same segment) to make sure they have a good grasp of their specific segment of the material and to discuss how they will teach their portion to their learning teams. 5) Students return to their learning teams and teach the material on which they are experts. 6) Ensure individual accountability by some means, possibly by using Pick a Card, Any Card or giving a quiz.

Note: If the Jigsaw is new to your students, start out with simple content. They will first need to learn the process before combing it with complex content. Also, after their Jigsaw experience, provide students with an opportunity to discuss how they worked as groups, what skills were needed to be successful, what worked well, and what they might do differently next time.



### **Graffiti (Chalk Talks):**

This activity allows students to get out of their seats and move around the room. You might use Graffiti to have students offer solutions to problems, list what they think they know about a topic, review what they have already learned, use vocabulary in contextual sentences, or to generate or brainstorm ideas. 1) Write several topics, problems, quotes or sentences on pieces of large chart paper and post them around the room. 2) Divide the student into groups of 4-6 and assign each group to one piece of chart paper. 3) Give them time to write their thoughts, ideas, or answers on the chart paper. 4) After the time limit is up, have the students rotate clockwise to the next piece of chart paper and continue writing. This time they will also be responding to what was written by the previous groups.

### **Formations:**

This strategy also incorporates movement. The object of formations is for each cooperative group to create a physical representation of a word, an object, or a process that they have learned. 1) Divide the class into appropriately sized groups, depending on what you are hoping the groups to create. 2) Give each group a slip of paper explaining what they are to represent with their formation. 3) Designate an amount of time to develop the formation. 4) Have groups present their formations to the rest of the class. 5) If the formations are incomplete or unclear, ask the class to offer suggestions that would improve the formation. Some ideas for Formations are as follows:

- Letters or numbers: Have students form the shape of letters they're learning.
- Spelling: Students use their bodies to spell out a term or vocabulary word.
- Vocabulary: Student form shapes to represent the definition, antonym or synonym of a vocabulary word.
- Geography: Students form a map of a state, country or continent.
- Math: Students represent an equation, a math process, or geometric shape.
- Science: Students represent the solar system or show how the earth rotates around the sun. Or they can physically depict the circulatory system or respiration.
- Technology: Students represent technological inventions.

### **All Hands on Deck:**

This strategy promotes participation by all students, focuses students on a topic to be studied, and helps uncover students' prior knowledge about the topic to be studied. 1) Post chart paper that lists subtopics of the topic to be studied around the room, and give examples of ideas that might be included on each chart. For example, if a high school social studies class was studying



the topic of the social conditions of the 1960's, subtopics might include popular music, television shows, recreational activities, famous slogans of the time, celebrities, famous historical or cultural events, etc. 2) Give each team of four students a stack of index cards with the same subtopics written on the posted chart paper. 3) Students divide the index cards equally among the members of the team. 4) Give students a designated amount of time (1-3 minutes) to brainstorm ideas about the subtopics, with the expectation that each student will contribute at least one idea per card. 5) When the time elapses, have the students pass their cards to the team member to their left and repeat Step 4. Continue circulating the cards until all team members have written on each card. 6) A designated reporter on each team reads one contribution for the selected chart on the wall in round-robin fashion while the teacher or a student records the ideas. When one chart is completed, move to the next.

Variation: Provide teams with pieces of paper with the subtopics printed on the top, and give each student a stack of sticky notes. Students write their ideas on the sticky notes and post them on the paper. Large-group sharing can be done by posting the sticky notes on the chart paper and conducting a gallery walk of the charts.

Note: To encourage individual accountability, provide student with different color writing implements or sticky notes.

### **I Have-Who Has:**

This is a great drill-and-practice activity or one you can use for review. Students can stand in a circle or stand or sit at their desks. The teacher gives each student a 3" by 5" card. On one side of the card is a term; on the other side is a definition of a term that appears on another card in the circle or group. Place a green dot on the definition side of one card. The student with the green dot starts by saying, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. The student who has the card with that term that matches the definition says, "I have..." and reads his/her term. That student then continues, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. This continues until all the definitions have been matched to the terms.

### **Inquiring Minds:**

This activity helps students focus on a class reading assignment, learn important questioning skills, and engage in higher level thinking. Have students work in teams of three or four and assign or allow them to choose their roles: The Reader, The Inquiring Mind, The Answerer and The Friend (if you need another role-The Friends helps the Answerer). 1) The Reader reads a selection of the assigned text. 2) The Inquiring Mind writes down the question on an index card, using a question starter and passes it to the Answerer. 3) The Answerer reads the question aloud and answers it. If he/she cannot answer the question, he may "phone a Friend" if there is a



fourth member of the group. 4) Once the team agrees that the answer is correct, the Answerer writes it down on the index card. 5) The roles shift to the left and the process repeats until the reading assignment is complete.

Note: To encourage teams to use higher-level questions, require each team to attain a certain number of points and assign values to the different level of questions. Give students question starters that reflect either the 6 levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy or DOK levels to help them think at higher, more critical levels:

- Knowledge -5 points
- Comprehension -10 points
- Application – 15 points
- Analysis – 20 points
- Synthesis – 25 points
- Evaluation – 30 points

## **Socratic Seminar**

*Adapted from ReadWriteThink.org*

This strategy guide explains Socratic seminars and offers practical methods for applying the approach in your classroom to help students investigate multiple perspectives in a text.

Socratic seminars are named for their embodiment of Socrates’ belief in the power of asking questions, prize inquiry over information and discussion over debate. Socratic seminars acknowledge the highly social nature of learning and align with the work of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Friere.

“The Socratic seminar is a formal discussion, based on a text, in which the leader asks open-ended questions. Within the context of the discussion, students listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. They learn to work cooperatively and to question intelligently and civilly.” (89)

Israel, Elfie. “Examining Multiple Perspectives in Literature.” In *Inquiry and the Literary Text: Constructing Discussions in the English Classroom*. James Holden and John S. Schmit, eds. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.



## Strategy in Practice

- Choosing a text: Socratic seminars work best with authentic texts that invite authentic inquiry—an ambiguous and appealing short story, a pair of contrasting primary documents in social studies, or an article on a controversial approach to an ongoing scientific problem.
- Preparing the students: While students should read carefully and prepare well for every class session, it is usually best to tell students ahead of time when they will be expected to participate in a Socratic seminar. Because seminars ask students to keep focusing back on the text, you may distribute sticky notes for students to use to annotate the text as they read.
- Preparing the questions: Though students may eventually be given responsibility for running the entire session, the teacher usually fills the role of discussion leader as students learn about seminars and questioning. Generate as many open-ended questions as possible, aiming for questions whose value lies in their exploration, not their answer. Elfie Israel recommends starting and ending with questions that relate more directly to students' lives so the entire conversation is rooted in the context of their real experiences.
- Establishing student expectations: Because student inquiry and thinking are central to the philosophy of Socratic seminars, it is an authentic move to include students integrally in the establishment of norms for the seminar. Begin by asking students to differentiate between behaviors that characterize debate (persuasion, prepared rebuttals, clear sides) and those that characterize discussion (inquiry, responses that grow from the thoughts of others, communal spirit). Ask students to hold themselves accountable for the norms they agree upon.
- Establishing your role: Though you may assume leadership through determining which open-ended questions students will explore (at first), the teacher should not see him or herself as a significant participant in the pursuit of those questions. You may find it useful to limit your intrusions to helpful reminders about procedures (*e.g.* “Maybe this is a good time to turn our attention back the text?” “Do we feel ready to explore a different aspect of the text?”). Resist the urge to correct or redirect, relying instead on other students to respectfully challenge their peers' interpretations or offer alternative views.
- Assessing effectiveness: Socratic seminars require assessment that respects the central nature of student-centered inquiry to their success. The most global measure of success is reflection, both on the part of the teacher and students, on the degree to which text-



centered student talk dominated the time and work of the session. Reflective writing asking students to describe their participation and set their own goals for future seminars can be effective as well. Understand that, like the seminars themselves, the process of gaining capacity for inquiring into text is more important than “getting it right” at any particular point.

Click on the link below to take you to grade specific lesson plans using Socratic Seminars.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html>

## Argument Chunk

Argument follows a standard pattern both when writing and speaking. Teach your student to use this pattern during classroom discussions and when writing arguments.

**#1 The Claim** is the thesis statement/topic sentence. It states the argument and gives an indication of the organization of the paragraph/essay.

**#2 Evidence** is the quote, the computation, the data, the statistics, and/or the findings. Evidence backs up the argument made in the claim.

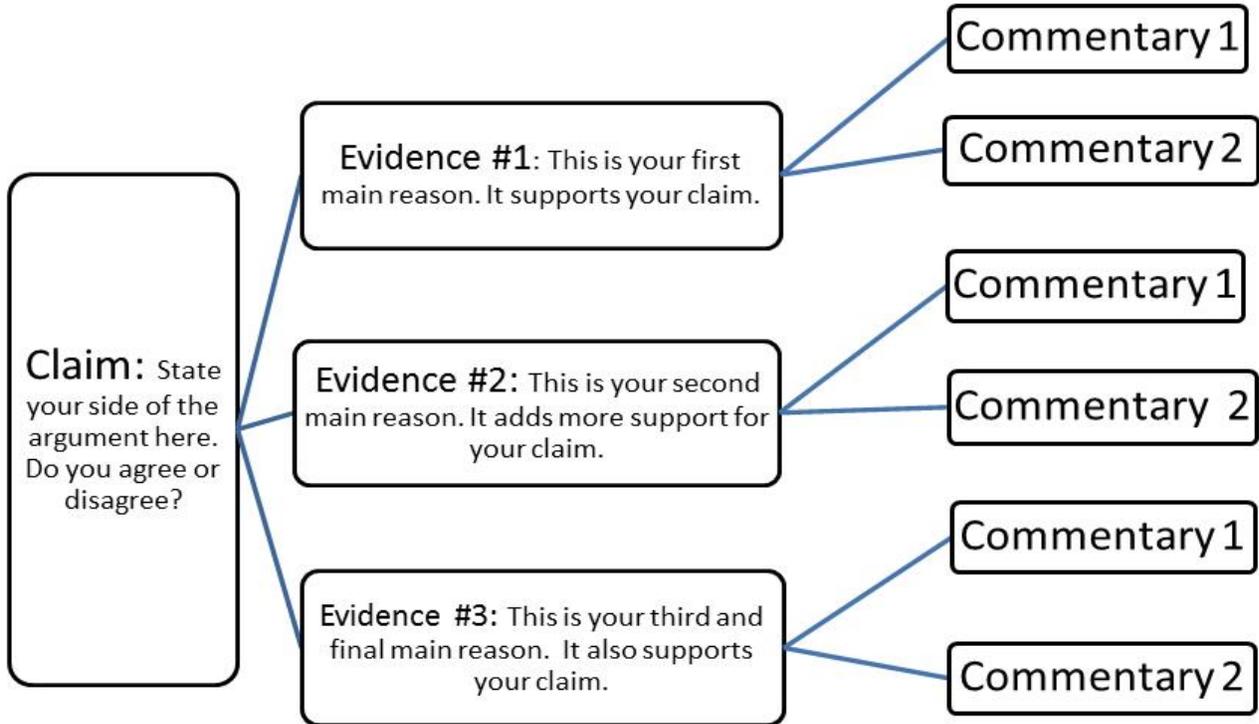
**#3 Commentary** (explanation) is the original thought that explains why the evidence supports the claim. It doesn't just translate the evidence to the layman; it brings in a new layer to the information that bring the argument home. This is the hardest part for students because it is the original thought, the thinking, behind their claim and the evidence they chose to support that claim. Students should aim for two sentences of explanation for each piece of evidence.

## Persuasive and Argument Maps

These maps show students how to organize their claim, evidence and commentary for an essay. The maps are based on the argument chunk explained above.



### Persuasive Map





### Argument Map

