

# Conducting Text-based Reading Discussions

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Reading and discussing the same work of literature—fiction or non-fiction—can quickly bring people together by creating a rooted, common experience. This experience has intellectual, emotional and social components, all of which deeply enrich the broader topic, as each participant brings his or her knowledge and experiences to bear on the group discussions.

## Anticipated Outcomes

- participants will be able to refer to specific passages to focus discussion directly on the text
- participants will be able to read and interact with text, asking questions that lead to new information, help to gain insight, or clarify misconceptions
- participants will be able to read non-fiction to gain information, explore author's point of view, and to create personal hypotheses that lead to interpretations about historical information
- participants will be able to expand their thinking about the text and about themselves as readers and thinkers by listening to a variety of responses to text

## Guidelines for Facilitators

### 1. Prepare in advance.

Read the selection and make notes. Anticipate some of the knowledge-based questions that might arise and do some background research. Your research doesn't have to be exhaustive, but come in prepared with some additional materials in case there are participants who are struggling with the readings on the level of basic content knowledge.

### 2. Allow a few moments for participants to silently gather their thoughts before beginning.

Begin each session by allowing a few moments for the group to silently look over notes and review their readings. This settles people into the conversation and is a great way for a teacher to begin a class discussion as well.

### 3. Begin the conversation.

Share an opening thought or guide the first step of the conversation. From that point, use a simple rule of thumb—In a 60 minute discussion, do not speak for more than 10 minutes, total. This is a major difference between facilitation and direct instruction.

### 4. Monitor the conversation.

Make sure that everyone has a chance to participate. Bring the discussion back to the main topic. Ensure that participants cite the text.

### 5. Allow time for ties to the classroom.

As teachers learn, they naturally think about classroom connections. Allowing discussion time will multiply the number of ideas generated.

### 6. Bring the discussion to closure.

Before you know it, discussion time will be up. Make sure that the discussion comes to closure about 5 minutes before the period ends. This leaves the opportunity for the facilitator or a group volunteer to summarize the main themes from the discussion. If you leave enough time and the group is under 15, you can ask everyone to think of something that stands out as the discussion finishes. Then, go around the group for a one- or two-sentence statement from each person.

## Guidelines for Participants

### 1. Prepare in Advance

Read the text in advance and make comments in the margin lines or on “sticky notes.” Comments can refer to questions you have, ideas you gain, things you're wondering about, things you don't understand, or disagree with, other connections you're making. . . .

### 2. Stick to the Discussion Topic

Don't talk about the Red Sox. (a little seasonal joke)

### 3. Cite the Text

Remember to read the whole sentence or paragraph so that when you refer to a specific citation, the context is also included. Remember to wait for everyone to find the page before you start reading.

### 4. Be Respectful

Share the discussion and make room for everyone to have a chance to speak if s/he desires. Make sure that “the point” is under discussion, not “the person.”