INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES



Fishbowl

Fishbowl is a strategy for organizing group discussions. Students are split into an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle, or the fishbowl, engages in the discussion while the students in the outer circle take notes. As the discussion winds down, those in the outer circle are provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

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FISHBOWL

Summary

This engaging and student-centered strategy builds comprehension of complex texts and ideas while developing group discussion skills. In the "fishbowl," students practice responding to multiple viewpoints. Observations from students in the outer circle provide insight into what makes for effective small-group discussions. Research supports the use of fishbowls as an effective way to engage students with a range of abilities in multiple settings.

Procedure

1. Choose a central topic or text. This can be read beforehand or as a Close Reading activity.
2. Ask for or select 4-5 volunteers to be in the "fishbowl." At this time, only the students in the fishbowl are allowed to talk.
3. Instruct the outer circle to observe and take notes on the content and process of the inner circle's discussion.
4. Throughout the first few rounds of the activity, you may want to play the role of the facilitator. However, once the process is familiar, select a few students who can facilitate the discussion. The facilitator does not participate in the discussion but can ask questions along the way to prompt deeper discussion and understanding.
5. You may wish to provide students with an open-ended question from the beginning, identify the focus of the discussion, or ask text-dependent questions for students to answer during the discussion.
6. As the discussion comes to a natural close, allow those in the outer circle to ask clarifying questions to those in the inner circle. You may also choose to rotate students in and out of the fishbowl throughout the course of the discussion.
7. Once all students have had an opportunity to rotate through the fishbowl, invite your students to debrief. Encourage them to use their observations and notes to highlight the strengths of the discussion and offer suggestions for more meaningful engagement.
8. Wrap up with a whole-class discussion about the process. You may also choose to have your students answer the lesson's essential question through a quick writing activity.