

4 Fishbowl Discussion

The fishbowl is an activity in which a small group of students engage in a discussion of a primary or secondary source, while the remainder of the class observes and takes notes. Participants interact with others to create meaning in response to the source, constructing new insights as they speak and listen to the insights of others.

Instructions:

1. Have students prepare for discussion by reading from a primary or secondary source and responding in writing to the following prompts (or choosing from Teacher Resource Preparing for Discussion of Primary and Secondary Sources).
 - What surprises you?
 - What interests you?
 - What questions do you have about the topic or for the author of the document?
 - What connections do you see with other events or ideas?
2. Select four to eight students to form a discussion group in the center of class. The remaining students are seated in a circle or semicircle around them.
3. Choose a group facilitator to begin the discussion by sharing one idea. Then each student in turn shares a new idea and these become topics for the discussion that the leader can then choose from. Remind students to use active listening techniques and discussion norms in this chapter.
4. Have students on the outside of the fishbowl record either:
 - statements from the discussion in which they agree or disagree or
 - specific examples of discussion norms and active listening skills being demonstrated
5. Debrief with the students both the content as well as the discussion process by inviting comments from both the discussion group members and outside observers.