

# Preparing Students for Discussion of Text

The quality of discussion depends in large part on both the preparation of students and the interest and complexity of the reading. It is important for students to read, analyze, and make written notes prior to beginning a discussion. When possible, it is best for written comments to be made directly in the margins of the text being discussed. This will help keep the discussion grounded to the text and evidence used to support ideas as well as enhance the depth and complexity of the discussion.

## **Instructions:**

Have students read a selection of text and use the prompts below to make written comments in preparation for a discussion.

- What surprises or interests you?
- What questions do you have about the text or for its author?
- What connections do you see between parts of the text and other ideas past or present?
- What predictions can you make?
- Given the facts in the reading, what else do you believe may be true?
- What cause and effect relations do you see?
- What evidence exists to support your ideas?
- What predictions can you make from the text?
- What personal connections do you have to the text?
- What are the most important ideas or passages in the text? Why?

## **Tips for Teacher Facilitators**

- Don't try long texts or long discussions at first, build gradually.
- At the start of each discussion, set the stage. Review the guidelines of the discussion but don't deliver a lecture.
- Take notes during the discussion: evaluate students, chronicle main ideas discussed, etc. Use the notes during the debrief, to help coach individual students, and to help students set goals for the next discussion.
- Never neglect the debriefing. The feedback is vital if the group is going to grow with each structured discussion. Request specific non-judgmental comments to help improve future discussions.
- Over time, use a variety of print and non-print texts: arguments, proofs, fiction, essays, poetry, quotations, artwork, editorial cartoons, etc.