

INQUIRY-BASED DISCUSSION

In an **inquiry-based discussion**, readers discuss their responses to an interpretive question about a text(s). An **interpretive question** stems from a genuine inquiry about a text, is thought-provoking and can sustain multiple responses.

The purposes of the discussion are to help readers to:

- “try out” their answers and explanations anchored with specific moments from the text;
- accept alternative views/interpretations of the same text (not about reaching consensus or proclaiming a winner);
- rethink what they think about the text; and
- understand that readers can have different valid interpretations of the same text.

PREPARING FOR THE DISCUSSION:

- The discussion leader, usually the teacher, explains inquiry to readers, models some responses, and describes the teacher’s and the students’ roles during the discussion.
- Allow enough time for the discussion given the text complexity.
- The discussion usually follows the second or third reading of a text.
- Individually, students WriteAbout the interpretive question and mine the text for evidence supporting their responses.
- Students are seated so they can see, talk to, and listen to each other.

FEATURES OF THE INQUIRY-BASED DISCUSSION:

- A central inquiry/question that can sustain multiple responses related to interpreting the ideas of one text or across texts focuses the talk.
- The facilitator prompts students to “say more” and to anchor their talk in the text.
- Initial student talk is exploratory and can be halting as participants “try out” and modify their answers and explanations.
- Participants return often to cite or re-read the text, texts, or their notes.
- There is usually genuine talk related to the question by over 60% of the group.
- Participants listen to each other using the ideas of others in their answers.
- At the end of the discussion, there is time for each participant to jot down what they are thinking about the text given the discussion.
- The teacher takes the long view on students’ discussions, expecting the students to get better as they have more experience.

ROLES FOR INQUIRY-BASED DISCUSSION:

Facilitator's Role: Each facilitator will lead an inquiry-based discussion and a step back of the discussion.

- The teacher facilitator is not a direct teacher or a presenter. The facilitator does not talk too much, does not repeat the talkers' responses, and does not verbally compliment or negate responses.
- When teachers step out of their role as guides and into their role as participants or teachers, they limit participation. (Vygotsky 1986; Alvermann, et al., 1996)
- The teacher facilitator:
 - Uses questions to get others talking;
 - Encourages everyone – not just some – to participate;
 - Presses for clarification and evidence from the text; and
 - Keeps the conversation on track during the time frame provided.
- Facilitate discussion as large group inquiry:
 - Encourage readers to listen to and learn from each other by not repeating their responses;
 - Remind them, only if and when necessary, of the guiding question under discussion;
 - Ask each discussant to validate answers with explanations anchored in evidence from the text;
 - Summarize a flow of 3 or 4 responses or question further to raise rigor of discussion -- not to do the mental work for students;
 - Ask participants to step back and reflect on what they learned from the discussion: *Would they now change their first Quick Write response and, if so, what would they change and why?*
- As teacher facilitator, you elicit what readers are thinking and validating with evidence, but you are not telling them your interpretation.
- The facilitator asks readers to step back and reflect on the discussion: *If they didn't participate successfully, what needs to improve and who has responsibility for the improvement?*