

Interactive Discussion Strategies **Dr. Frank Serafini - Arizona State University**

These strategies are designed to help students and teachers engage in dialogue concerning pieces of literature. They are not designed as assessment devices, nor as products to turn in for a grade. They are designed to be done by students and then used to reflect on the reading experience and share ideas within a community of readers. It's not necessarily the activity itself, it's how it is carried out and used to promote invested discussions.

Turn, Pair and Share – After I have read a book to the class, I invite children to turn to a partner and share their ideas. Some children may be reluctant to share their ideas in a large group setting, and often find this “pair share” more inviting. I then ask students to share any ideas that were discussed with the whole class.

Share Circles – When students sit in a circle and face one another, they tend to have more to say and are better positioned to listen to each other. I find that when students sit in a traditional arrangement most of the comments are directed towards the teacher, rather than towards each other.

Word Storm – Have students write down ten words that come to their minds as you are reading a book aloud. Then each student chooses three words and writes a brief reflection concerning their reasons for choosing those three words. Discuss choices and reasons in small groups or whole class.

Graffiti Boards – As you reading aloud a picture book or chapter from a novel, students are invited to write “graffiti” on a large piece of chart paper in small groups. Sometimes it's easier if you read the book twice and students write/draw the second time through. Symbols, words, sketches are all acceptable. Share with class.

Walking Journals – Purchase a notebook for students to respond to read alouds. After reading a picture book or chapter in a book, write some ideas, reflections in the notebook and give it to a student to read and respond. The student reads your ideas and then responds. The notebook circulates around the room until the next day when you can use the ideas to begin a new discussion.

Character webs – Since so many novels for children focus on characters, have students either independently or in small groups create a web of ideas about a particular character in a novel. These ideas can be shared with the whole class.

Storyboards – Either take apart old paperback copies of a picture book, or make color copies of the book and display them in storyboard fashion on the wall. You can discuss the illustrations only, the text only or the interplay between them.

Letters to Characters – Have students write letters to a character asking them questions or telling them what they thought about their actions. Give these letters to other students to respond the way they think the character would respond.

Interview a Character – Have one student pose as a talk show host and another as an important character in a story. Interviewer asks questions and the student must respond the way they think the character would respond. Student must be able to defend responses based on what is known about the character.

Sketch to Stretch – Students are given drawing paper to sketch some ideas that stretch their understandings of the story being discussed. This is not easy to make work. Students want to draw covers and illustrations. This is designed to take students' thinking farther, it is not an art lesson.

Impressions / Connections / Wonderings Charts – Create a class chart with the following headings; Impressions – what impressed you about the book, what did you notice; Connections – what literary and personal connections did you make with the story; Wonderings – what questions or wonderings did you have about the story. These charts can be used across books or for individual titles.

Commentary Bulletin Board – Have students write down their thoughts about a read aloud on post-its and post on bulletin board. These can be used to extend discussions.

Illustrated Quotes – After a book has been read aloud, students are invited to select a particular quote from the story and illustrate what they think goes with the quote. The more abstract the quote, the more interesting the illustrative possibilities.

Pass a Note – Have students write back and forth about what they have been reading. No talking is allowed. Students must read each others notes before responding. This slows students down and forces them to attend to other readers' thoughts.

Visual Story Line – Using chart paper, have students visually diagram the structure of the story. Demonstrations are essential for success. The hero cycle, multiple storyline books, complicated plot twists work well here. This should be done as a whole class before students do it on their own.

Jigsaw Reading – Students are each given a part of a story or poem. They read their part then meet in small groups to explain what their part was about and build interpretations with other students that have read other portions.

Official Meanings (What would the test ask?) – In order to help students on standardized tests, we want to help them understand the different things they will be asked on these tests. In a double entry journal, on one side have students list what they think might be asked on a test, and on the other side what they think is important.

Summary 3-2-1 – After reading a picture book, have students write a three sentence summary, then a two sentence summary, then a one sentence summary. Discuss what was left out each time and how they chose what to include. Look at the Library of Congress summary on the copyright page for more ideas. Discuss why they might be different.

Element of Literature Chart – Have students complete a chart that asks them to identify the plot, characters, theme, mood, setting, symbols etc of a book. This chart can be used across several books about the same subject or different versions of the same story.

Language Games – Vocabulary knowledge is essential for understanding texts, especially informational texts. Students need to attend to unknown words. Have students keep lists of words that challenge their meaning making processes.

Multi-Genre Writing Projects – Have students take a story or poem and transpose it into another genre, eulogy, picture book, poem, calendar, research report, postcard etc. Students' writing must remain true to the story and true to the characters as they interpret them. Then be able to defend your choices.

Book Music – Have students select songs that they relate to a particular story or poem. Be able to discuss the connections made.

Story Scripts – take a story or poem with dialogue and turn it into a play or skit. Include blocking, stage and set directions and dialogue. This can also work in reverse, have students take a play and write a story.

Character Psychoanalysis – Have students talk or write about what is in a characters' head, their motives and reasons for their actions. Discuss psychoanalytic theories to account for actions.

Gap Filling – As Iser has stated, writers intentionally leave gaps the reader must fill in to understand the story. Have students take a part of a story that is vague and give details to explain what has been left out.