

Activity Sheet:

Sample Discussion Guidelines

Building a Literary Community

Here are some *suggested* guidelines to consider as you begin to build your own literary community with your students. Paramount to creating a viable classroom literary community is the opportunity for students to take ownership of the classroom environment they help to create. Consider the following ideas as you create discussion guidelines in concert with your students:

Attitudes

- All contributions are valuable and deserving of respectful attention.
- There is no such thing as a “bad idea.” But some ideas do not hold up. Help one another to explain, reflect, and evaluate ideas to determine what works and what needs to be revised.
- There are many interpretations of literature, and hearing others’ views helps us develop our own understandings.
- Questions are essential in the process of understanding literature.
- You may express opinions about a piece of literature as long as you can also explain your reasons for your opinions.
- Understandings of literature are constantly open to change, revision, and debate.
- It is O.K. to not like a piece of literature, as long as you have reasons why.
- It is O.K. to not understand something, but you should also remain open to possible understandings in the future, built through discussion and further reading.

Behaviors: Come Prepared

- Read and think about the piece.
- Bring questions.
- Bring your book and any assigned writing.

Respond Appropriately

- Address your responses to classmates by using eye contact and not necessarily to the teacher.
- Do not put down another person’s idea.
- Ask questions when you don’t understand someone’s viewpoint and when you are curious about something.
- Disagree politely, providing examples to back up your own opinion.
- Continue to raise questions about the text, related texts, experiences, and possible interpretations.
- Refer to significant passages that confused you, inspired you, or just struck you.
- Discuss the author’s craft and what about it worked or did not and why.

Thinking

- Respect each individual’s idea by listening, responding appropriately, and by thinking about what they have to say.
- Every time you think about the literature, discuss it and interact with it. Expect that your interpretation is going to change or evolve.
- There is no “right” or “single” interpretation of a work of literature. But this does not mean “anything goes.”
- Questions are just as important as answers and ideas. You can learn from your questions. Good questions provoke discussion and exploration and can lead to sharpened understanding.
- Examine what it might be like to “walk in a character’s shoes.”
- Use examples from your own life experiences, in order to connect to the reading, as well as to explain your perspective.
- Think about what you can learn from the reading or what the reading has taught you about your own life. Share these ideas.
- Refer to passages that you find significant.
- Did the text inspire you? Confuse you? Did you like the style of the passage?
- Consider how the style of the writing affected your reading and your interpretation of it.
- Continue to raise new questions.