

Student-Led Seminar Discussion Outline

Traditionally, **classroom discussions** are often centered on the teacher's talking, thinking, and leading, and students are only engaged for small amounts of time.

When exploring Global Issues, it is often more effective to have a more **student-centered discussion** – in which **STUDENTS** do most of the talking, thinking, and leading – this can be accomplished through a **seminar-style discussion format**. In this setting, students freely share thinking with one another without that pesky, interjecting teacher getting in their way.

In this course you will be responsible for bringing topics to the discussion table and leading productive and worthwhile **seminars** within your table groupings. There are also times when you will be presenting to the entire class. Here are some steps to get your fellow classmates involved in truly productive student-led discussions:

1. **Seminar Questions:** Assign multiple seminar questions to the group. A seminar discussion question does not necessarily have a “right” answer at all, but is designed to open up multiple viewpoints and thoughtful consideration from the group. **SEE QUESTIONING TIPS BELOW.**
2. **Time to Think:** Before actually getting to the discussion, give students time to think about each question on their own. Students may use their learning journal to record thoughts, ideas, perspectives, quotations from stories, and any new questions prior to discussion.
3. **Arrange Groups (optional):** Students don't have to discuss all the questions they're assigned – they only need to discuss one. Assign students to groups, or have them select which question they'd like to discuss.
4. **Share Expectations:** Now that students have prepared notes with their own thoughts, quotes, and questions, they have laid the groundwork for a meaningful discussion with one another. With practice you will learn how they share thoughts, listen respectfully, disagree openly, and ask questions of one another. As a teacher, I will NOT be participating! If it gets awkwardly silent (which it may from time to time), I will try not to rescue you. How long you are expected to hold a conversation with one another will vary and will be discussed prior to the seminars starting.
5. **Begin Discussion:** There are many different ways to actually have students discuss. Sometimes student table groups will discuss simultaneously; other times one group will lead a discussion while others listen in.
6. **Take Notes:** Once students begin discussing, my role shifts to listening and note taking. I may record and grade what kind of contributions each student is making to their group's discussion. I will also be taking notes on what you discuss.
7. **Reflect:** Student-led discussions are great for getting students to explore certain content. After you have finished discussing, students will spend time reflecting with students on what

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kind of contributions they made, what they learned, and what they could do to have an even more effective discussion next time.

Now, with a student-led discussion, students don't sit in rows, don't rely on the teacher, and don't silently keep their thoughts to themselves. Instead of the teacher hogging the attention, students' thinking comes to the forefront and they are given the opportunity to freely explore their ideas through a thoughtful conversation with one another.

Questioning Tips

Here are five teaching tips for high-level questioning:

1. **Require ALL learners to answer the question.** This is when using the "all-write" strategy is very helpful. Instead of simply asking a question and having one or two students raise their hand to answer, the teacher should have ALL students write down an answer to the question. This way the teacher has gotten all of her students involved in the question and answer process. Or, instead of having all students write their answer, the teacher could simply ask the question and have ALL students share their response with a partner.
2. **Require students to defend, or back-up, their answers.**
3. **Use Bloom's Taxonomy** (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation) to create high-level questions. For example, instead of asking, "Which U.S. President authorized the use of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II?" a teacher could ask, "Was President Truman justified in using the atomic bomb to end World War II and why do you think that?"
4. **Differentiate questions as appropriate.**
5. **Promote examination of new and different perspectives.** For example, instead of asking, "What happened at the Boston Tea Party?" a teacher could ask, "If you were a British soldier, how would you have reacted when you heard the news about the Boston Tea Party?"

By using these simple teaching tips for high-level questioning, you can not only get your entire table group involved in the lesson, but also get all those students to gain a deeper understanding of the content by challenging them to think critically about each answer.

A SIGN UP CALENDAR WILL BE PROVIDED SO THAT YOU CAN SIGN UP TO BE THE LEAD FOR 2-3 SEMINARS.