

Guidelines for Shared Inquiry Discussion

Great Books discussion participants of all ages use the guidelines below. When students are new to Shared Inquiry, it is important to read and talk about these guidelines together at the beginning of the first several discussions. These guidelines appear in the front of Great Books student and teacher's editions.

1. Listen to or read the text twice before the discussion. If prepared, you can support your opinions with evidence from the text and respond to others' ideas.
2. Discuss only the text everyone has read. When you discuss personal experiences or unfamiliar texts, people may feel excluded, and the discussion may drift off topic.
3. Support your ideas with evidence from the text. Evidence helps you do more than simply agree or disagree. Evidence enables everyone to weigh the validity of different ideas.
4. Listen to other participants and respond to them directly. Shared Inquiry is about learning from each other. Instead of always responding to the leader, look at other group members and speak directly to them.
5. Expect the leader to only ask questions. The leader is curious about the text and wants to know what everyone thinks. Through questions, the leader helps you develop your own ideas about the meaning of the selection.

The Shared Inquiry Discussion Page

After reviewing the guidelines, the Shared Inquiry discussion page is distributed to students (see pp. 12 and 13 for sample pages). The leader reads the focus question for discussion and displays it for everyone to copy. (The question may also be preprinted on the page.) The discussion begins only after everyone has written an initial answer to the question.

Conducting Shared Inquiry Discussion

The leader's role in Shared Inquiry discussion is to help the group consider, compare, and develop different ideas about the text, so that each student arrives at his or her own well-supported interpretation of the text. The following practices will help you achieve this goal.

1. Ask follow-up questions often. Be ready to ask your prepared cluster questions, but know that most of your questions will be spontaneous.
2. Turn to the text frequently. When a student gives evidence, say, "Can you read that part? Let's hear what the story says." This teaches students to ground ideas in the text and read closely.
3. Keep everyone on track. If students veer off on tangents, ask, "Will you explain how that answers the focus question?"
4. Go slowly and explore students' responses in depth. Give students time to think after you ask a question. Before moving to a new idea, be sure everyone understands what has been said.
5. Communicate that it is okay to have different opinions. Good literature invites different interpretations. Being open to other viewpoints is part of learning.
6. Give everyone a chance to contribute. Tell students that your seating chart helps you include everyone. Near the end of the discussion, invite students who have not yet spoken to comment.
7. Encourage students to speak directly to one another. Tell students to look at the person whose idea they are responding to, rather than at you.
8. Be open to questions about *your* question. If a student seems puzzled by or reluctant to answer your question, ask if there is a part of the question that's confusing.

"Careful grappling is its own reward; it leads to further grappling. The result is not only a sense of the complexity of moral judgments but also an understanding of the nature of creativity and of scholarship."

THEODOR R. SIZER AND
NANCY FAUST SIZER
THE STUDENTS ARE WATCHING