

Good Discussion Techniques

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Open-ended Questions

Motivation for human choices

Why do you think a character behaved in the way that he or she did?

Consequences of human choices

Did a character make a “good” or “bad” choice? What makes you think that?

Options characters could have considered but didn’t

In what other ways could a character have acted?

Attitudes towards a character’s behavior

Did the reader like or dislike the way a character acted? Why?

Reminders of story events in the reader’s own life

Does a participant have a similar personal experience to share?

Connections to other stories

Does the story remind the reader of other stories we’ve read?

Connections to current events

Does the character remind the reader of people or topics in the news or on TV or in the movies?

Plan a list of questions

Place prepared questions in the book as prompts

Let the group be your guide

Remember plans are a place to depart from.

Go with the group.

Be Flexible.

Construct questions to elicit multiple responses

In what ways does the story/character...?

Why do you think...?

What would you have done...?

What does that remind you of?

Do you think...?

What are ways...?

What are other options?
How does that choice affect...?
What if it were different...?

Positive feedback

Good point.
I hadn't thought about that.
That relates to...

Create a safe environment

Accept different points of view
Give positive feedback.
Create an expectation of multiple points of view.
Take risks involving your own personal history.
Model healthy disagreement, especially with the storyteller.
Invite people to share.
Value what others say.
This discussion, right now is more important than something we might say or getting through the material.

Focus on the different perspectives the participants bring out

Follow up questions such as:
Good. What else?
That relates to what Meche said earlier...
How does this differ from what Juliana said?

The Five Whys

Improve critical thinking by going deeper. Get to the root of why a person thinks something by asking "why" questions. Take it to new levels. Keep digging. What happens when you believe two things that are at odds with each other. It's getting messy! We are on the right track...

Tell me more.
Why is that important to you?
Why do you say that?
What if...?

Silence can be golden

People need time to analyze their answers, let their wheels turn.
Allows people to get to the underlying motivations and values.
Not everyone thinks at the same rate or depth.
Provides opportunity for second language learners to process language and their own responses.

Think, pair, share

Ask a question and tell participants not to respond.

1. Give them 30 seconds to think about it.
2. Turn to your neighbor and discuss your thoughts.
3. Each pair shares something with the group.

Respect where individuals are at any given moment.

For reasons we may know nothing about, a person might not be able or comfortable enough to speak. That is okay. They can still be involved. When the time is right he or she will contribute, provided we have created a non-threatening environment and truly value what they have to say.

Body Language

Conduct discussion seated. (I don't know if I can do this.)

Physically acknowledge and respond to the whole room.

Use eye contact.

Turn your body.

Lean in.

Stand near those who are participating only minimally.

Be Yourself!

Use your strengths. Challenge yourself. Step out of your comfort zone and model good discussion techniques.

A good discussion is multi-directional, contains differing opinions, allows for the unanticipated and is capable of taking sharp turns when you least expect it. A good discussion makes everyone think a little outside of their comfort zone (norm), providing the opportunity for expanding the way we think and react to this and related situations.