**Fishbowl Discussions**

A. GOAL

* The goal of the strategy is to both empower and enlighten student comprehension of literature; it can be used to introduce or reinforce any big ideas or details relevant to a text situation—the key is to simply provide a clear context to the situation and clear questions for students to answer.
* The fishbowl discussion relies on the fishbowl as metaphor. The majority of the class—students and teacher—act as the inanimate “bowl,” with desks arranged in a circle around the “fish” in the center of the bowl. The members of the bowl must spend most of their time listening carefully to the conversation by the fish in the center of the bowl; only once the teacher determines that the “fish” in the bowl have run their course with their conversation may the “bowl” students voice opinions, insights, and/or inferences. The “fish” inside the bowl are the active participants in the conversation at hand, and focus only on each other—usually the “fish” have been given questions or prompts to discuss (either the class before or rather spontaneously in the given class). To complete the metaphor: the “water” that the fish are engulfed in is the conversation that they have; when the conversation dries up, the teacher indicates to the “bowl” students that they can now add some “fresh water” and participate.
* The audience is students and teachers.
* Materials: books (if applicable), pens, 3x5 cards (if applicable), paper.
* Since the fishbowl discussion is highly contextual, the prior knowledge or teaching required depends on the situation.
* A great fishbowl discussion can occur in a 45 minute class or the majority of an entire 80 minute block.
* Source: "Fishbowl Strategy." *Mequon-Thiensville School District*. Web. 13 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.mtsd.k12.wi.us/MTSD/District/ela-curriculum-03/oral_language/fishbowl_strategy.html>>.

B. STEP-BY-STEP

* Take, for example, students in AP English Literature reading *Huckleberry Finn*. Students have been put into “fishbowl groups” of 3 each, and have been assigned questions or topics to answer and/or discuss for a specific section of the novel or for the novel as a whole. For example, fishbowl groups might be assigned the following types of questions: “What role does food play in the novel and what does it tell us about characters, values, and social structures?” “What role does money play in the novel, and what does it tell us about characters, values, and social structures?” “In what ways does the Mississippi River function as a symbol throughout the novel?” “Discuss the significance of the ‘youth/adult’ dichotomy and what Twain might have been suggesting about adults and ‘society’ in general through his treatment of this binary opposition.”
* Students will have a set amount of time—perhaps one or two classes’ worth of time or something like 20 minutes depending on the complexity of the questions and the depth of insight and connections that the teacher deems appropriate at the given time—to prepare their discussion. The teacher can give the questions in the form of a 3x5 card or can simply assign them however fit.
* As soon as the fish’s conversation dries up, the teacher allows the bowl to participate with further questions or insights.
* It is never a bad time to model a practice question—perhaps a rather simplistic but relevant question—to reinforce important facets of the fishbowl such as fish talking only to teach other, fish diving deep into their topic, and the fishbowl actively listening and formulating questions/comments.
* Sometimes it is the actual fish’s discussion that is most engrossing and inference-filled, as the fish aspire to keep their conversation flowing for as long as possible, and sometimes it is the follow-up fishbowl discussion that is most engaging, as a large school of eagerly listening fish have developed a number of questions, comments, or connections while listening to the bubbling conversation.

C. EXTENSION

* The fishbowl, at a minimum, creates strong momentum to guide students back into their text (if they were not already finished). It also often adds further polish to big ideas/themes/motifs that have been discussed throughout a novel. Sometimes it generates entirely new insights that have not yet been discussed in class but are entirely relevant (and sometimes these insights—students will discover after some cursory Internet research—are insights that have been bantered about by professional literary critics in academic papers; such a realization is always a wonderful moment for English student and teacher alike).

Both the big ideas discussed and/or discovered as well as the smaller details analyzed in the fishbowl always lead to richer understandings of literature; this richness is often then reflected down the line by student writing that is marked by high levels of engagement and genuine interest in ideas.

**Seeing Both Sides**

**(Could be pre, during or after reading)**

This strategy can be used with fiction or non fiction reading (even viewing). It forces students to look at both sides of a question or an issue.

At first, the teacher poses the questions, but eventually students may be able to create their own questions. The purpose of the strategy is to have students go deeper into the text to find evidence to support their discussion before they jump to conclusions.

Have the chart on paper to hand out, giving lots of space for student notes. Make an overhead for the notes. You could also make a large version and keep it up on the classroom wall.

This strategy does not require a lot of prior knowledge and can be used with all ages.

it is an activity that can take a short time, for example when discussing reasons to buy one phone over another, or in depth discussion such as is Ralph guilty of murder (Lord of the Flies).

Source: School District No. 44, North Vancouver (1999). *Reading 44: A Core Reading Framework*. SD #44. N. Vancouver, (p. 135).

B. In and early scene of the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Paul's friend dies. During this scene it appears that the medical staff do not care about the boy's death. In literature with this type of conflict, students can use a chart such as this to find reasons to support either side of a well worded question. One for this particular scene might be, Are the medical staff guilty of misconduct in allowing the soldier to die? There is evidence in the text to support yes and no.

Students work together to reread the scene and jot down quotes and thoughts about the quotes that support both sides of the question. It is interesting to see how students jump to a conclusion, and then when forced to look at both sides, start to recognize that things are not always as simple as they seem on the surface.

C. Extension

This type of chart can lead into a debate, formal or informal, students can also take turns defending one side and then the other side.

Follow up assignments:

In English 12, students would write a short essay discussing the differing attitudes towards Kemerich's death, but the chart will have served to push their thinking and give more empathy to the orderlies and medical staff in that scene.

D. Younger students can use charts such as this to consider both sides of an argument, purchase, classroom conflict etc. As they become more comfortable with the notion that their are two sides to each question, then they can transition to literature and non-fiction.

How this strategy builds a love for reading:

Weaker students may not understand that authors build arguments; they may also not understand that character may have dilemmas that are not easily solved. Through working with this strategy, students will come to understand these dilemmas and will recognize their importance in the plot line, character development, or content organization. The more readers can understand text structures, the more they will enjoy their reading.

**Paraphrase x 3**

A. GOAL

* “Paraphrase x 3” moves readers quickly toward interpretation “because it tends to uncover areas of uncertainty and find questions. It instantly defamiliarizes” and “keeps your focus small so that [students] can practice thinking in depth rather than going for an overly broad ‘big picture’” (Rosenwasser 33). Essentially, the goal of “Paraphrase x 3” is to reveal possible meanings of words—“it’s a mode of inquiry” (Rosenwasser 33). “Paraphrase x 3” focuses on the connotations of words, and how those connotations can change when replaced by synonyms; the end goal is to better understand the nuances involved in the passage—and, in the end, the importance of (accurate) language—and to consider the exactitude of the author’s diction. George Orwell might have loved this strategy.
* The audience is students.
* Prior knowledge or teaching is minimal; the only teaching required is to one time teach the strategy—then a quick review is usually all that’s necessary in future uses.
* “Paraphrase x 3” is also wonderful because it is a quick way (perhaps as fast as five minutes depending on the passage and the students, but more likely in the neighborhood of ten-fifteen) to dive deep into a reading and consider the passage from multiple angles. It is a great way to do style analysis without students necessarily knowing that they are doing style analysis.
* If students are stuck on difficult passage, or having a difficult time finding inspiration, this strategy can be a great way to do a quick student-centered, quiet focus activity.
* Source: Rosenwasser, David, and Jill Stephen. *Writing Analytically*. Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009. Print.

B. STEP-BY-STEP

* Select a single sentence or phrase from whatever it is that you are studying that you think is interesting, puzzling, and/or especially useful for understanding.
* Do PARAPHRASE X 3:
	1. Find synonyms for all of the key terms in the passage and rewrite the passage
	2. Do this 3 times
* Reflect. What have you come to realize about the original passage on the basis of repeated restatement? (Rosenwasser 34)

C. EXTENSION (OPTIONAL)

* “Paraphrase x 3” can easily be used as valuable fodder for such next steps as an all class discussion, partner discussions, a teacher-led “think aloud,” small group discussions, or quick written analyses that even further deepen student engagement with the text at hand.

D. WARNINGS

Similar to the “5 S” strategy, be careful to present it as a valuable tool—go for student buy-in right away. Model enthusiasm and show how the strategy can be highly useful and eye-opening (and used on any piece of language or snippet of conversation heard—say, in the school hallway, for example: a fun homework exercise!).

**It Says -- I Say**

**(for use: During Reading or After Reading)**

A. Goal of the strategy is to transition students into looking carefully at text to find pieces that are clues to subtextual meaning. This strategy is to show students that insight and inference are not just pulled out of a hat, but are strategic.

Synopsis of strategy:

Students fold a piece of paper in 1/2 hot dog style.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| It says | I Say |
|  |  |

As students read the text, they jot down important points or ideas or quotes, and then on the right side they jot down their ideas of "what it means to them" (Beers 69).

Goal of strategy is to "see connections between what the text says and what that means"(Beers 69) to students. In the long run, the ultimate goal is for students to recognize that pieces of text can be considered carefully, and can act as clues to the author's message/meaning etc. In the end, we would hope that students can easily implement this strategy in their minds, without the use of paper and pencil.

Audience is students.

Materials a piece of fiction or non-fiction, plus a piece of paper to jot down notes and a writing utensil.

Prior knowledge or teaching: I suggest that teachers model this strategy for the first use, and then after a few attempts, students should be able to use this without teacher mediation. It can be as detailed as students choose to make it and will last as long as the piece of text.

Source: Beers, G. Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do: a Guide for Teachers, 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. Print.

B. Step-by-step description of how to implement the strategy.

I have used this strategy with my grade 10 students to introduce them to "hidden meanings" in songs. The lyrics of [Unwriten](http://www.metrolyrics.com/unwritten-lyrics-natasha-bedingfield.html) are clearly open to interpretation and insight. I create a chart for the students and on the It Says side, I give them key lines and phrases from the song. We discuss a few together, and then students work with a parnter to complete the I Say side of the chart. This week, I then assigned student pairs one phrase each and they led a short discussion on their phrase. First they said the phrase and what they though the hidden meaning could be; then they invited the class to add their insights. By the time we were through discussing all the important phrases, students had a clear understanding of literal and inferential discussion.

C. Extension

In grade 10, this It Says/I Say activity dovetailed well into teaching students to integrate quotes into their writing to support their discussion. Students were able to use all the ideas they had read/written/head and summarized them in paragraphs explaining Natasha Bedinfield's message to teens.

Beers (166) discusses and extension of this strategy to add Question-It Says-I Say-And So. In this example, the teacher gives the question, the student looks for the text support, thinks about the information, and then combines both to "come up with an answer." I think this extension would work for both fiction and non-fiction, but is less likely to be used when students are reading for enjoyment.

D. Controversy/Warnings in using this strategy?

I have two MID students in my class, and they work with an EA. for this chart I had the EA feed them answers to say. At first this worked well, but by the end of the discussion they were actually starting to take part and add their own examples. These students' strengths lay in their ability to make connections to their own lives if I gave them specific ideas to connect to. For example, when have you felt afraid to try something new.

How this strategy builds a love for reading:

As students learn to focus on parts of the text that they can discuss, their skill level with this strategy will increase. According to the research, being able to recognize important points and their possible inferences will lead to increased enjoyment.

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