

PRACTICE BRIEF:

Supporting Emergent Bilingual Students in Middle School Social Studies

Structured Peer Discussion

What is it?

Structured Peer Discussion engages diverse groups of students in dialogue about essential vocabulary and key concepts related to the instructional content. Teachers establish peer discussion norms and routines to maximize opportunities for students to use academic language. Ensuring that every student engages in oral discussion enhances learning for all students, but for emergent bilingual students, structured peer discussion builds peer support for language and content learning. Use Turn and Talk Routines for a quick and easy way to get students talking about key vocabulary and big ideas in the lesson. Use Heterogeneous Team Discussions for longer discussions focused on the overarching unit goal. Read more below.

How do I use this in my classroom?

Turn and Talk Routine

This paired peer discussion routine requires students to make language connections with what they are learning, while the teacher takes a brief pause in teacher-led discussion, minimizing disruption to the flow of teaching. The discussion prompt focuses on a key concept or vocabulary word.

Turn and Talk Steps

1. Assign partners. Teachers often assign “table partners” or “seat partners,” so that students can quickly turn to a nearby peer. In this strategy, teachers pair EL students with a partner who can provide encouragement and language support as they engage in the task.
2. Explicitly teach a Turn and Talk routine by setting an expectation for each partner to orally explain their own response to a prompt. Establish a time limit, about 1 minute, and establish a signal for pulling the class back to the lesson.

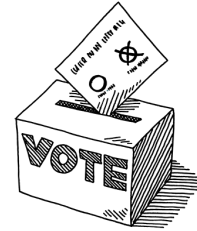
3. Within a lesson, mark a few places to pause the lesson for a Turn and Talk. For each Turn and Talk, create a prompt that requires students to discuss a key concept, use essential vocabulary, and/or apply it to their own lives

Turn and Talk Lesson Example

Warm-up:

Let's first discuss a couple focus words:

Democratic: relating to a form of government in which citizens can vote.



Turn and Talk: How would a class president be elected in a democracy?

Individualism: This is the belief that the interests of the individual are of greatest importance. When people believe in **individualism**, they encourage people to follow their own interests or talent.



Turn and Talk: Do you think your school values individualism? Provide evidence that supports your view. Also, think about evidence that does not support your view and consider how to address it.



From *Ancient Greek City-states*:

TE page 49

Heterogeneous Team Discussion

This structured peer discussion routine presents a specific task requiring students to orally discuss a key concept and apply their collective knowledge in an oral or written response. The aim is for every student to have a role in the discussion.

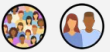




Heterogeneous Team Discussion Steps

1. Establish heterogeneous groups of about four students. Teams will work together through an entire unit to prepare for a culminating activity. In WorldGen, teams engage in weekly activities leading up to a final unit debate.

- Throughout the unit, create weekly knowledge-application tasks, often guided by a graphic organizer, that lead up to a culminating activity.
- For each team discussion, assign each student a role that contributes to the task. For example, if the prompt is to prepare an argument or take a position on a question related to the current lesson, roles might be to a) prepare an opening statement, b) compile supporting evidence, c) prepare a counter argument, and d) prepare a closing summary.
- Allot time for each part of the activity: discussing the prompt, sharing ideas and evidence, and practicing arguments to present to the class. Set a timer for each phase.
- Set clear expectations for participation and accountability. Provide extra support to any students having difficulty and encourage group support. It is helpful to include reflection on the group process during follow-up discussion.

Heterogeneous Team Discussion Lesson Example

Taken from Athens Sparta TE page 49

Session Introduction (5 minutes)	Was is better to be an Athenian or a Spartan? → Session 2
 Whole Class Activity and Partner Work	<h3 style="color: #f4a460;">Session 2: Arguments, Claims, and Evidence</h3> <p style="background-color: #f4a460; color: white; padding: 2px;">Session Introduction</p> <p style="border: 1px solid #f4a460; padding: 5px;">One thing that historians do to prepare for debate is identify claims and the evidence that supports them (both pro and con). You are going to form an opinion about which high school is better. You will need to include all the parts of a good argument. This means presenting a claim, the evidence, and an explanation of why the evidence supports the claim. Then, you will identify a counter argument and present evidence against the counter argument.</p>
Feedback Based on Class Check from Session 1 See instructions above	<p>Warm-up: Let's first discuss a couple focus words:</p>
State Purpose for the Session <i>Today we will be reviewing the Reader's Theater script to analyze the characters' arguments and the evidence they provide. We will be practicing skills that real historians use when they debate a topic. Historians prepare for debate by identifying pro- and con- claims and the evidence that supports them.</i>	<p>Democratic: relating to a form of government in which citizens can vote.</p> 
Introduce and Review Focus Words Remind students that the focus words will be in bold throughout the unit. Start by reviewing the words " compete " and " elitist ." Explain that these words are very important to the unit because the Greek city-states competed against each other and they had elitist attitudes.	<p>Turn and Talk: How would a class president be elected in a democracy?</p> 
<i>Before you read, we will discuss our focus words for this unit. Let's review the two words we have already learned. What does compete mean? Turn to your partner and give a definition.</i>	<p>Individualism: This is the belief that the interests of the individual are of greatest importance. When people believe in individualism, they encourage people to follow their own interests or talent.</p>
<i>Now, let's focus on "elitist." If we describe someone as elitist, what do we mean?</i>	<p>Turn and Talk: Do you think your school values individualism? Provide evidence that supports your view. Also, think about evidence that does not support your view and consider how to address it.</p>  
<i>A new word is, "democratic." Say, "democratic." Democratic is relating to a form of government in which citizens can vote, meaning that there is social or political equality. If everyone can vote on something, they have an equal voice. A democracy is a government based on voting.</i>	<p>Turn and Talk: Ask students to discuss this question, "How would a class president be elected in a democracy?"</p>
Distinguish between a democracy and an oligarchy. Tell students:	<p>Turn and Talk: Is a democracy or an oligarchy more fair?</p>
<i>In a democracy, all citizens have the right to vote and participate in decision-making, so there is political equality. In an oligarchy, only the elite group of rich, powerful people can make decisions.</i>	<p><i>Another new word is "individualism." Say, "individualism." This is the belief that the interests of the individual are of greatest importance. When people believe in individualism, they encourage people to follow their own interests or talent. In many Greek city-states, the people believed in individualism, so people excelled in their own ways.</i></p>
Turn and Talk: Ask students to discuss this question, "Do you think your school values individualism ? Why or why not?"	<p><small>World Generation - Adapted by The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, University of Texas at Austin and Center for the Success of English Learners from Social Studies Generation © 2015 & 2021, Strategic Education Research Partnership • seprep@utexas.edu</small></p>

Why is structured peer discussion effective?

Structured Peer Discussion provides opportunities for emergent bilingual students to fully participate in grade-level content instruction with strategic peer support. Research shows that this practice integrates language and literacy instruction into content learning, providing opportunities for emergent bilingual students to simultaneously develop language proficiency and subject-specific knowledge. The integration of academic literacy and literacy skills into a content-rich curriculum enhances learning for emergent bilingual and English proficient students. Studies show positive effects for content knowledge, vocabulary and disciplinary literacy for all students. Though studies show strong, positive effects for explicitly taught vocabulary, there is also evidence that students acquire more vocabulary words that are incidentally taught.

Why structured peer discussion improves literacy:

- Domain-specific background knowledge is often the strongest predictor of reading comprehension for readers in the middle school grades and beyond.
- Instruction that intentionally combines language, literacy and academic content enhances academic learning for emergent bilingual students
- Effective social studies instruction for emergent bilingual students provides ongoing opportunities for extended writing, oral interaction, and collaborative academic discussions because these activities scaffold comprehension

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