

The Pinwheel Discussion

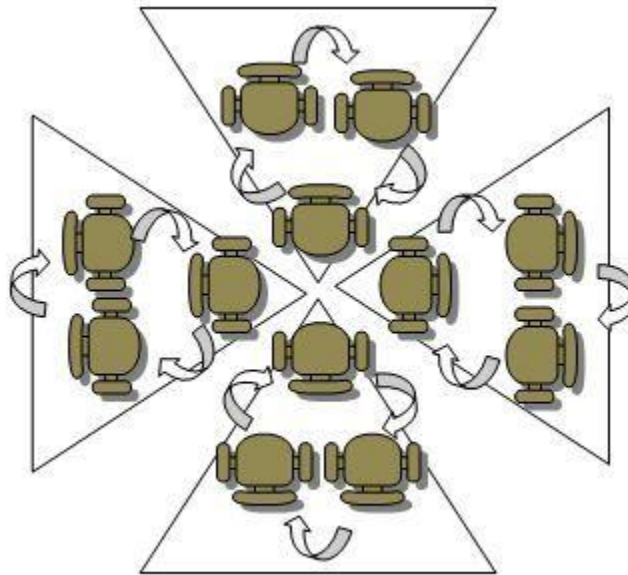
What is a pinwheel discussion?

In this type of discussion, the class is divided into four groups (or according to the size of the class or the number of personas needed), and chairs are moved into a wheel. At the center of the wheel, sits one representative of each group plus a *provocateur*, a moderator and facilitator of sorts whose role is to keep the discussion going with provocative questions.

What are the benefits of a pinwheel discussion?

1. Maximizes student participation
2. Provides freedom for students to state their opinions
3. Enhances higher order thinking skills
4. Increases student engagement
5. Allows for both formative and summative assessment

Steps in a pinwheel discussion:



1. Divide the class into groups (five is probably the top end, with four groups and one provocateur group.) Group students any way you choose, but having strong students in the provocateur group can make early discussion more successful.
2. Assign each group an article, a role, a character, author, etc. Each student approaches the discussion from the standpoint of the text they received. (Side note, if using the technique with a novel, then the student assumes the persona assigned to that group, i.e.: They will no longer answer as Jason, but as Harper Lee or Huck.
3. Give groups time to discuss their text—the context, characters, important textual evidence, etc.—and to come up with at least one discussion question. They also need to prepare to answer that question and any other using their text. If you want to give students some guidance, give them a theme or focus idea, like “the experience of orphans,” or “rebellion and conformity,” etc. Especially at the beginning of the year, working with Costa, Blooms, open vs. closed-questions, etc. help tremendously.

4. At the end of the 10 minutes, each group must submit at least one question they think is important to understanding their author or story. Text dependent questions starts are great for this stage and for discussion (see handout) Talk to the Provocateur Group and tell them their job is to move the discussion along in interesting and thoughtful ways. This means asking provocative questions, listening and asking follow up questions.

5. Chose a student participate from each group to take part in the first discussion round. They each move to the center square. The provocateur opens discussion with the first question. At a certain point, students pinwheel out of the discussion to be replaced by another member of their group. You could pinwheel when each participant contributes something of merit *and* in character a certain number of times, or you can simply call for the switch and all groups would pinwheel at the same time.

6. Involve students outside the center group, too! Following along with the central discussion, they post

comments on a bulletin board site. You can let this just happen spontaneously if you have a strong group, or you can assign a minimum number of posts and topics. Students track participants and post on their participation, or, if you choose, they could record their own thoughts through:

- a. Follow Up Questions
- b. Connections
- c. Textual Evidence
- d. New Ideas

7. Continue the discussion until everyone has participated in the center. If you have a smaller or larger class, you can adjust the numbers of groups or participation loops it takes to make it work for you.

8. Reflect. As with most classroom activities, reflection is a key element to solidifying the learning.

You can have student reflect on the process or the content. They could complete a journal write, a discussion board, exit slip, sticky post, etc.

Assessment:

1. You could grade this discussion using any participation rubric, or you could simply use the natural consequence of two approved responses gets the student out of the spotlight.

2. If grading the discussion, itself, students may need to repeat through roles until everyone has participated.

3. If using a venue like TodaysMeet or Padlet, have students attach their name to their comments for accountability.

4. Tally skills for discussion and/or analysis on the board.

Text Dependent Question/Statement Starts

Start With Evidence Based Phrases:

According to , ...

From the reading I know that ..., for instance ...

In , ...

On Page , it says ...

Based on what writes on page , ...

Move To Question Stems:

Why do you think did ?

What do you think meant by ?

What would you have done if you were ?

Why do you think included .

What would happen today if... ?

How does compare/contrast with ?

What evidence can you find for ?

Do you agree with ?

What is the most important ?

Or Statement Stems:

The problem with the story is ...

What really wants is ...

I learned .

The author switches voices because .

Types of Questions:



1. Factual:

Soliciting reasonably simple, straight forward answers based on obvious facts or awareness. These are usually at the lowest level of cognitive (thinking) or affective (feeling) processes and answers are frequently either right or wrong.

Example: Name the Shakespeare play about the Prince of Denmark?

2. Convergent:

Answers to these types of questions are usually within a very finite range of acceptable accuracy. These may be at several different levels of cognition — comprehension, application, analysis, or ones where the answerer makes inferences or conjectures based on personal awareness, or on material read, presented or known. While these types of questions are valuable in exercising mid-level cognitive thinking skills, it is quite easy to expand students' cognitive processes even higher by adding another layer to these questions whereby teachers ask students to justify their answers in light of the evidence offered or the inferences made.

Example: On reflecting over the entirety of the play Hamlet, what were the main reasons why Ophelia went mad? (This is not specifically stated in one direct statement in the text of Hamlet. Here the reader must make simple inferences as to why she committed suicide.)

3. Divergent:

These questions allow students to explore different avenues and create many different variations and alternative answers or scenarios. Correctness may be based on logical projections, may be contextual, or arrived at through basic knowledge, conjecture, inference, projection, creation, intuition, or imagination. These types of questions often require students to analyze, evaluate, or synthesize a knowledge base and then project or predict different outcomes. Answering these types of questions may be aided by [higher levels of affective](#) thinking as well — such as valuing, organization, or characterization. Responses to these types of questions generally fall into a wide array of acceptability. Often correctness is determined subjectively based on the possibility or probability of the proposed answer. The intent of these types of questions is to stimulate imaginative, creative, or inventive thought, or investigate “cause and effect” relationships.

Example: In the love relationship of Hamlet and Ophelia, what might have happened to their relationship and their lives if Hamlet had not been so obsessed with the revenge of his father's death?

4. Evaluative:

These types of questions usually require sophisticated levels of cognitive and/or emotional (affective) judgment. In attempting to answer these types of questions, students may be combining multiple cognitive and/or affective processes or levels, frequently in comparative frameworks. Often an answer is analyzed at multiple levels and from different perspectives before the answerer arrives at newly synthesized information or conclusions.

Examples:

- How are the deaths of Ophelia and Juliet the same and yet different? (Compare and contrast.)
- What are the similarities and differences between Roman gladiatorial games and modern football?
- Why and how might the concept of Piagetian schema be related to the concepts presented in Jungian personality theory, and why might this be important to consider in teaching and learning?

5. Combinations: These are questions that blend any combination of the above.