
Small-group Discussions: Group Roles

Information Circles: Interpreting Nonfiction Text

Students are divided into groups of a certain size - for example, five members. Each student is assigned a specific role and responsibility to carry out during the small-group discussion.

Purpose

- Encourage active participation by all group members.
- Foster awareness of the various tasks necessary in small-group discussion.
- Make students comfortable in a variety of roles in a discussion group.

Payoff

Students will:

- all speak in small groups.
- have specific roles to fulfill, clearly defining their role in the small group.
- receive positive feedback that is built into the process.
- participate actively in their learning.

Tips and Resources

- Information Circles work on the same principle as *Reading Circles**; however, the students are working with non-fiction materials rather than with fiction.
- When information circles are first introduced, model each role before group work commences.
- This strategy can be applied to any content area when students are required to read and interpret information. Because of the collaborative nature of the strategy, it is best applied when exploring a problem, question or a controversial issue.
- Consult your school library for suitable resources to support your curriculum topic.
- Rarely will you find enough non-fiction books on a single topic for the entire class. Consider:
 - rotating groups of students through centres using non-fiction books and substitute alternate types of resources on the topic.
 - using video, print or on-line encyclopedia article(s), web site(s), and magazine or newspaper article(s).
- This differentiated teaching and learning strategy:
 - helps students develop strategies for finding and interpreting relevant data from informational texts.
 - honours multiple intelligences.
 - engages students who prefer to read non-fiction.
 - supports reading development through purposeful talk and active listening for special needs students.

Info Tasks for Successful Learning pp.62, 109-113.

**Small Group Discussions: Reading Circles* www.elan.on.ca.

Further Support

- Build subject specific vocabulary for ESL students.
- Provide multiple opportunities to consolidate knowledge, to practise and to understand concepts and key ideas.
- Teacher may join small group(s) to model and facilitate.

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Notes

What teachers do	What students do
<p>Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select curricular issue/problem and develop engaging question(s) to guide the student inquiry. Post and discuss some guiding question(s). • Decide on the number of students in each group and the roles and descriptions. • Prepare role cards. See Student Resource, <i>Sample Role Cards for Information Circles</i>. • Select a variety of texts at appropriate reading levels to have enough resources for every class member e.g., information books, videos, web site(s), magazine or newspaper articles, print or on-line encyclopedia articles, selections from the textbook. • Schedule times and locations for work. • Read aloud the picture book, stopping to model each role as appropriate points in the text. • Let students clarify roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the guiding question(s). • Understand the responsibilities of each role and the group task. • Participate in class responses to each role.
<p>During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide the class into groups and assign types of text and roles for the first day. • Remind students to use the guiding question(s) to focus the discussion. • Review timing and develop assessment criteria. Circulate, ensuring that all students are on task. • Each day, interact with and provide support to one (or more) group(s). • Allow approximately two-thirds of class time for reading and completing role tasks and one-third for a sharing circle. • Instruct students to individually complete their log. See Student Resource, <i>Learning Logs for Information Circles</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay on task by revisiting role cards and the guiding question(s), and when needed, the modeled responses. • Complete the role task. • Share findings and participate in their group circle discussions. • Listen attentively. • Support and encourage other group members. • Adhere to time limits. • Complete learning log after each working session.
<p>After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the activity until all students have experienced each centre and all the roles. • Give students time to review their role work sheets and to complete Student Resource, <i>Learning Log for Information Circles</i>. • As a class, discuss common findings and record on chart paper. • Have students complete Student Resource, <i>Small-group Discussion Reflection Sheet</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all role work sheets. • Complete final summary on Student Resource, <i>Learning Log for Information Circles</i>. • Participate in class discussion. • Complete Student Resource, <i>Small-group Discussion Reflection Sheet</i>.



Sample Role Cards for Information Circles

<p style="text-align: center;">The Wordsmith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Today you are the Wordsmith. Your job is to read and view your information text and keep track of new and interesting words/phrases that you discover.• Select six interesting words/phrases.• Use a dictionary to record the meanings and be prepared to share your findings in discussion/information circle.	<p style="text-align: center;">The Data Digger</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Today as the Data Digger you are trying to uncover information to help your group find the answer to our class question.• Record your discoveries in point form on index cards or sticky notes.• Review your data and select the most relevant to share in discussion/information circle.
<p style="text-align: center;">The Questioner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the Questioner you will have the opportunity to probe the information you read and view with a critical eye.• Record questions you have as you read the text.• Review your questions; select your best six and share at discussion circle. <p>Note: Vary your questions, using the question starters - who, what, when, where, why and how.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Reflector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Today you will be asked to make personal connections to the information you are reading and viewing.• Consider:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Is this important? Why?</i>- <i>Do you agree or disagree? Why?</i>- <i>What is your opinion?</i>• Record your thoughts and share them at the discussion circle.
<p style="text-align: center;">The Illustrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After completing your reading/viewing, your task today is to think of a way to record the key ideas you discovered in a visual format. You are the Illustrator!• Try a chart, graph, sketch, web, cartoon, diagram or a combination of visual formats.• Prepare to present your visual record to the group.	<p style="text-align: center;">The Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As Moderator, you have read/viewed your information text. Your task today is to keep the conversations flowing in your group.• Encourage others to comment and ask questions.• If your group is straying off topic remind them of the inquiry question(s).• Remind the group to fill out their learning logs.

Adapted from *InfoTasks for Successful Learning*. Pembroke Publishers, 2001



Student Resource

Learning Logs for Information Circles

Date Text used Reflections and questions	Role
Date Text used Reflections and questions	Role
Date Text used Reflections and questions	Role
Date Text used Reflections and questions	Role
Date Summary Ideas	



Small-group Discussion Reflection Sheet

Name: _____ Role: _____

Topic: _____

- A. Comment on **your group's ability** to work together in a positive manner. Consider cooperation, listening, and organization.

What are your group's strengths?

What are your group's areas for improvement?

- B. Comment on **your own ability** to work in a positive manner. Consider cooperation, listening and organization.

What are your strengths?

What are your areas for improvement?

Comment on your success in fulfilling the role you were assigned.