**STUDENT-CENTERED DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE**

**Inner/Outer Circle**

**Objective: To create a totally student-centered format for the class discussion that fosters critical thinking.**

**Procedures**

1. Prior to the first day of discussion, students are assigned to create a certain number of questions (usually 5) related to the focus of the discussion. These must be brought to class the day of discussion. The teacher may choose to check the questions for a completion grade or to include them as part of the overall grade for the activity.
2. The teacher’s initial instructions should include the requirements of each circle:

**Inner Circle**

* Serves as the discussion panel for student-generated questions
* May or may not take notes
* Each member should provide at least **two (2) quality** responses

(extension, cause/effect, elaboration-**fully supported by textual evidence**)

* No moderator; no hands raised – listen and “jump in”
* Follows rules of courteous discussion
* May ask questions of each other only
* No interaction with outer circle or teacher

**Outer Circle**

* Responsible for guiding/motivating/extending inner circle discussion (through questions)
* Listen/take notes/ask questions
* Each member should ask at least **one (1)** question
* No moderator; no hands raised – listen and “jump in”
* Follows rules of courteous discussion
* No “yes” or “no” questions allowed
* No interactions with inner circle or teacher
* **May not respond** to the inner circle discussions

1. On the day of the discussion, the teacher pre-arranges desks in an inner and outer circle. Groups can be formed on a volunteer or teacher-selected basis (i.e. Have students number off 1 and 2; all 1s are inner circle, and all 2s are outer circle.
2. The inner circle discusses for the pre-determined time or until the teacher feels all these students’ thoughts have been fully expressed.
3. The teacher may or may not intervene during the discussion; but if he/she does, it should be **only** to reinforce the discussion or ask for clarification or extension if a student does not. **THE TEACHER’S ROLE IS ONE OF OBSERVER.** His/Her primary role is to monitor and/or evaluate the activity.
4. The teacher may ask for summaries at the end of the discussion period. Students or teacher may write down main points on the board to ensure all have necessary information.
5. The inner and outer circles switch positions either during the same class period OR on consecutive discussion days.

**INNER/OUTER CIRCLE VARIATION (for experienced students)**

1. Have students keep a log of major themes presented in a novel or drama. Students should note how these themes are emphasized through characterization, setting, symbols, diction, and imagery. Page numbers and exact quotations from the text are essential.
2. The reading and the log can be done outside of class while the teacher conducts other studies during class.
3. Schedule as many days for inner/outer circle discussion as you have themes, and conduct an inner/outer circle discussion on a **different theme** each day.
4. The day before each discussion, provide the theme to be discussed and have the students scan their logs for two (2) places in the novel or drama that are key to the development of that theme (in their opinion). Have the students transfer notes and page number references to a **separate sheet of paper** to bring to the discussion.
5. Allow students to make their own seating selections. For half of the period, students in the inner circle share their findings from the notes they made the night before, while the students in the outer circle take additional notes on their papers. **NO QUESTIONS ARE POSED FROM THE OUTER CIRCLE IN THIS VARIATION**. For assessment purposes, have the students draw a line between their notes made at home and the additional notes taken in the outer circle.
6. Switch positions midway through the class period and follow the same procedure.
7. An evaluation criterion is at the teacher’s discretion. The reading log makes an excellent assessment by itself.

**Application**

**Pre-reading Activity**

Students can be asked to come to class with questions related to the themes/values/issues/concepts of upcoming reading. This discussion will then allow students to identify their feelings/opinions/degree of knowledge of the topic before the reading so they can more easily relate and respond as they read.

**During reading Activity**

Select certain stopping points in a lengthy reading to have students come to class with questions they need/want answered.

**Post-reading Activity**

Have students to justify/confirm predictions/feelings/opinions. See if additional thoughts/questions are raised for further research.

**Writing**

Have students use their notes from inner/outer circle as a basis for a composition or an essay reflecting in some way on personal, text, or world connections.

**Assessment**

The entire inner/outer circle process can be graded or not graded. For grading purposes, the teacher can check questions, participation, and/or notes. Peer evaluation can be used as well.