**CRISS**

**Discussion Strategies**

According to research, students learn best when they engage in meaningful conversations about content. As we all know, our students are social beings; they like to talk. When we can engage them in conversation related to our content, we ensure that they are learning and internalizing the information. If you are able to verbally explain something and teach it to someone else, that is a higher level of understanding than just answer questions on a worksheet. We also know that students need to be focused during discussion; CRISS provides multiple discussion strategies to keep conversation engaged on the content.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind when planning lessons using discussion:

* Conversations about content occur when students are focused on accomplishing a task
* Writing about thinking first can help a student prepare for discussion
* Having students create their own authentic questions helps ensure participation
* Good discussion strategies focus on “student talk” not “teacher talk”

Here are some strategies that will help you address the aforementioned concepts:

* Think-Pair-Share (2)
* Mind Streaming (2)
* 3 Minute Pause (3)
* Concentric Circle Discussion (3)
* Read and Say Something (4)
* Sticky Note Discussion (4)
* Discussion Web (5)
* QARs (5)
* Seed Discussion (6)

**Think-Pair-Share** (pg 56): During a think-pair-share, every student becomes an active participant. It works well as a pre-reading activity, as a problem-solving strategy, as a break in lecture, or as a follow-up activity. The nice thing about this strategy is that you don’t just get the same students participating in discussion. It allows for all students to have their voices heard without the intimidation factor of saying something in front of the entire class.

1. Teacher begins by suggesting a topic or asking a question.
2. Students “think” and write down what they know or have learned about a particular topic.
3. Then, have students “pair” with each other or a small group of students (this can be done quickly with someone sitting near them, or you can have them move around the room). Have them share the ideas that they thought about.
4. Conclude with a whole-class share discussion. Have students share some insight that their partners talked about.

***Differentiation***: This activity can be done in many ways: it can be formal or informal. It is a nice replacement for a typical brainstorming activity. It is also a good way to prepare students for a writing assignment. It allows them to discuss their ideas with someone else before jumping right into an assignment.

**Mind Streaming** (pg 57): In this strategy, students work in pairs to bring out their background knowledge about a topic. This strategy can also work as a post-reading/listening strategy in which students would review what they have learned. This strategy makes sure that all students have a chance to share something; it also makes students work on their listening skills.

1. Have students get in pair (student A and student B). Provide students with a general topic to think about (example: the Renaissance).
2. Student A talks for one minute about the topic. The student should try to talk for the entire minute sharing everything that he knows and anything that pops into his head. Student B listens and encourages student A.
3. Then the roles reverse. Student B talks for one minute about the topic. Encourage student B to try and share new information that student A didn’t already share. Student A listens and encourages student B.
4. Bring students back to the large group and share some of the ideas that came up during their partner discussions.

***Differentiation***: You can do multiple things with Mind Streaming: you can have students do a “think” first and write down thoughts and then discuss; you can have students get into two lines facing each other and share that way (rotate the line for more discussion – kind of like speed dating).

**3 Minute Pause** (pg 57): This is a very informal discussion strategy that makes for a nice break during class. It’s good to use during lecture or long periods of focused work. It gives students a break from the lesson format and allows them to talk through the material that they’ve been learning. Remember, discussion helps students make meaning and internalize the content. Pausing every 10-15 minutes helps students “fix” new information in their memory.

1. Have students stop while reading, watching a video, or listening to a lecture and turn to a partner or group.
2. Students should do the following during their 3 minute pause discussion:
   * Summarize what they have been learning
   * Identify something that they found interesting
   * Ask any questions about confusing information
   * Make a prediction about what they might learn next
3. Resume the original activity.

***Differentiation***: You can do multiple things with the 3 minute pause; it doesn’t always have to be a discussion. You can have students do the tasks in writing. You can have students draw something – this is called **“Stretch and Sketch”**. The whole idea is that you want students to become metacognitive about what they are learning. We don’t want zombies just copying down the notes from the overhead; we want them to actually learn and retain the information.

**Concentric Circle Discussion** (pg 57): This discussion strategy works well for reviewing content in whole-class groups or in groups of six or more. This strategy works well because students can review key concepts, offer personal interpretations, and review vocabulary with very little teacher intervention.

1. Each student gets an index card. On their index card they need to review or explain a key concept (you can assign these or you can have them choose). Then have students stand facing each other in two concentric circles.
2. Each student on the inside circle pairs with a student on the outside circle. Both students use their cards to explain the concept to one another. (give students a time limit of one to two minutes per person).
3. During the conversation, the partners should ask questions to make sure that they understand the information.
4. After completing both explanations, the two students trade cards. The outside circle moves clockwise one person, and each student is now paired with a new partner.
5. Students must now explain the information described on the new card to a new partner. The process is repeated and students again get a new partner. (If you are doing small groups, the rotation can continue until the student gets his original card back)

**Read and Say Something** (pg 58): This discussion strategy is effective for difficult materials. Rather than letting students struggle with meaning alone, have them work with a partner so they can grapple with meaning together. You can use this to review class notes, for problem solving in math, for descriptive writing, looking at issues, and as a basic small group activity. As the title suggests, this strategy should be used with some kind of text reading.

1. Have students get into pairs or small groups. Divide the assigned text into sections (for more difficult texts divide it paragraph-by-paragraph; for other readings, depending on length, you can make the sections longer). Each student is assigned a section(s) to be a leader of.
2. Have students read through the assignment section-by-section. At the end of each section, the appropriate leader should “say” something about what they just read. They can say anything that they want related to the text: reactions, ideas, questions, images, confusing sections, etc…
3. Proceed on through each section of the reading having each leader say something about her section.

***Differentiation***: You can have students write down questions in their group that they would like answered by the whole class (things that still confuse them). You can adjust the sections of texts based on the difficulty and reading ability of students. You can also change the “say something” portion. Instead of having the reader say something about what he just read; you can have the person to the right of the reader say something. This forces students to listen/read the text, not just listen to the reader’s summary of what was just read.

**Sticky Notes Discussion** (pg 61): This strategy works effectively when students are working in literature groups, reading word problems in mathematics, or dealing with challenging science and social studies materials. It is another method of annotating. Have students use sticky notes as they read or after they have read to mark the places that they want to talk about. Students should jot down on the sticky note some key words to help them remember why they marked the spot.

1. Assign students a selection of text to read. Instruct them to use sticky notes to mark places that they would like to discuss. They should explain on the sticky note what they would like to say: question, reaction, image, connection, etc…
2. Begin sticky notes discussions as a whole class. Have students volunteer things that they wrote down on their sticky notes. The important thing is that this is a student led discussion, not teacher led.
3. Make sure to explain to students how sticky notes help them become more involved in their reading than more traditional methods of teacher led discussions.

***Differentiation***: You can turn this into a written discussion. Have students choose a sticky note that they wrote on. Have them pass sticky notes to other people. Students will then respond to their classmates’ initial reactions and questions. This written discussion will ensure 100% participation in the discussion.

**Discussion Web** (pg 59): This is a helpful strategy to use when you want students to think through both sides of an issue. This strategy will challenge them to rethink a topic, to challenge viewpoints, and to acknowledge arguments. The Discussion Web helps students untangle different points of view by actively involving everyone. This is not only a helpful discussion tool, but it’s also a good during-reading strategy to give students a purpose and a focus.

1. Give each student a copy of a discussion web. Have students write the guiding question in the center box. Make sure to explain how the web works and what kind of information they need to fill in as they read/think.
2. Have students fill in both sides of the argument based on the text/discussion. Challenge students to come up with multiple reasons for both sides; don’t let the strictly focus on the side that they agree with.
3. Based on the information that they’ve filled in, have students come to a conclusion/answer to the original questions that was posed.
4. Have students use their conclusions as a basis for discussion. Have them share what side they think is right using the support from the discussion web.

***Differentiation***: Again, there are many things that you can do with this strategy depending on the type of learners you have in class. You can have students work independently on the web and then have them create a conclusion with a partner. The pair have to agree on the conclusion, which means they might have to try and convince the other that they are right. For kinesthetic learners you can get them up and moving. You can have one side of the argument on one side of the room and the other side on the other side of the room. Then you will be able to visually see the conclusions that students came to.

**QARs** (pg 70): This questioning strategy helps students understand how questions are written and encourages students to develop and analyze their own questions necessary for productive discussion and comprehension.

1. Introduce QARs with a reading selection. Make sure each student has a copy of the four kinds (either put on a transparency, board, or as a handout).
2. Introduce each kind of question then develop an example question from the reading.
3. After you have modeled several questions for each type, explain that the students will be asked to develop questions on their own. These questions will generate discussion and possible test questions

* Right There – Answers are in the text. The words used to make the questions and the answers are in the text in the same sentence.
* Think & Search – The answer is in the text, but you need to put together different pieces of info.
* Author & You – The answer is NOT in the story. You need to put it together with what you know and what the author has said.
* On My Own – The answer is NOT in the selection. The question is global, not text-tied.

**Seed Discussions** (pg 63): This strategy helps students lead their own discussions. It is very similar to the concentric circle discussion in that students choose the important information that they want to talk about. It also puts students in charge of their learning. This skill has to be worked on and modeled in order to show students what a good “seed” would be. Good “seeds” grow into a discussion; less effective “seeds” result in little discussion.

1. As students read have them keep track of the following:
   * Information or situations I don’t understand
   * Comments about what I have learned
   * Things that seem surprising or interesting
   * Vocabulary I want to know
   * Descriptive writing I particularly enjoyed
   * Things that remind me of other things I know (connections)
2. After reading, have students get into small groups. Have one person begin the introduction by introducing a seed (one of their notes from above). Have at least four students in the group say something about the seed before moving on to another. If little can be said about the seed, it means that the seed is not strong enough.
3. Help students model discussion behavior by showing how students can respond to one another:
   * “I really like what you said about..”
   * Do you have any other ideas about…”
   * “I agree with you…but I also think…”

***Differentiation***: You can differentiate this lesson by setting up the discussion however you would like. You can do this as a large group discussion on in small groups. You can assign group roles to students as well: leader, manager, checker, communicator, etc… This might be a good strategy to help teach cooperative grouping and how to effectively work with others. You can also turn this into a written activity.