

Modified Fishbowl Strategy



1. Provide a common reading(s) and background/vocabulary on an unresolved, controversial, or difficult issue to the class. Utilize a reading strategy to help students to access the text. Provide vocabulary instruction in the most important Tier 2 and Tier 3 words. Have students write down their interesting facts and quotes that help them understand the issue on post-it notes or small pieces of paper.
2. Make two to three circles in your classroom with +/- 5 chairs in each. The chairs will face inwards. Outside of each circle, make another circle of chairs.
 - a. The inner circle of chairs is the fishbowl and students in these chairs are very talkative, intelligent and scholarly fish.
 - b. The outer circle represents people who love to learn from their fish and provide them “fish food for thought” when they wish they were in the fishbowl themselves or want to assist the fish.
 - c. The teacher will choose one person from the outside circle to be the “fish trainer.” This person interjects only if the conversation gets off track. This person will rephrase the question and ask the fish to go back to their discussion.
3. RULE: Only students in the fishbowl (inner circle) are allowed to speak during this activity.
 - a. Students in the fishbowl engage in discussion or deliberation on an issue presented, as an open-ended question, by the teacher.
 - b. All participants must abide by the rules of civic discussion and common courtesy (accountable talk).
4. The outside circle has a responsibility of providing “food for thought” (strip of paper/post-it) with relevant information that can be used by the fish. For this reason, it can be very positive to pair students on the inside/outside of the circle so that someone with great confidence is on the outside helping the less confident “fish” on the inside.
5. Once a student in the circle has spoken twice, a student from outside the circle may tap that student on the shoulder and switch places with the student. The student on the outside MUST TAP IN after their inside partner has spoken four times. The student in the circle will exit to the outside observation seats. This process can continue throughout the discussion.
6. The teacher does not participate in the discussion except to provide a new question or to terminate an irrelevant, or inappropriate, line of discussion.
7. It is highly effective to have two to four separate (but related) discussion questions. After you have completed a fishbowl on one question, you can begin the next question by reversing the original groups. Fish become fish feeders and feeders become fish.
8. Including a written reflection piece alongside an evidence piece is a great way to assess student learning.

