

Resource Guide: Strategies for Student Discourse

The purpose of this Resource Guide is to outline the importance of discourse in the social studies classroom to ensure rigorous and equitable social studies instruction. Shifts in social studies standards require inquiry, critical thinking, and collaborative discussions to reach mastery. What follows are specific examples of discourse strategies for discussion, dialogue, debate, and deliberation. Teachers can utilize this guide when designing discourse integration into their social studies lessons. Teachers will also find examples of discourse included in the sample task and assessment sections of the New Mexico Social Studies Instructional Scope 1.0.

Strategies for the Discourse Guide for Social Studies

Strategies for Discussion			
Name	Description	Resources	Use
Turn and Talk	A routine that increases opportunities for all students to participate in discussion simultaneously in order to make predictions or process new learning in a low risk environment	The Teacher Toolkit	Discussions are short conversations that are used for the exchange of ideas. They are helpful if our students have little to no prior knowledge, and are just beginning to develop their skills in evidence and explanation. Discussions are not meant to go back and forth, but to allow each person to have a voice. They are often serial monologues that tend to encourage individual sharing,
Think-Pair-Share	Collaborative learning strategy where students work together to respond to a prompt, solve a problem, or make a decision by thinking quietly about the prompt, partnering with a classmate, and then discussing the prompt for 2-5 minutes. This strategy is most beneficial in helping students to connect content to real life.	How to Use the Think-Pair-Share Activity in Your Classroom	
Snowball Discussion	Also known as a pyramid discussion, this	The Snowball Discussion	

	strategy allows students to begin in pairs, responding to a prompt with their partner. After each partner has shared their ideas, the pair joins another pair, creating a group of four. Pairs share their ideas with the pair they just joined. Next, groups of four join together to form groups of eight, and so on, until the whole class is joined up in one large discussion.		
Kagan Cooperative Structures	Strategies for interaction in which students practice a variety of interpersonal functions and academic conversations to improve educational outcomes	Kagan Cooperative Structures Site	
Last World Protocol	This strategy is useful for document analysis. Each member of the group selects a passage that stuck out to them, and each member of the group must reflect on that passage before the conversation moves to the next student and passage.	Facing History Version of the Last Word Protocol School Reform Initiative Version of the Last Word Protocol	
Strategies for Dialogue			
Name	Description	Resources	Use
Conver'stations'	A small-group dialogue strategy that gives students exposure to more of their peers' ideas and prevents the stagnation that can happen when a group doesn't happen to have the right chemistry.	Conver'stations: Inquiry Lesson Plan Strategy	Dialogue is best used when there are potentially controversial topics to discuss, and there may be differing opinions. In dialogue students listen to each other in order to understand, make meaning, and seek to find points of connection.
S.P.I.D.E.R. Web Discussion	A Harkness type dialogue in which a question or topic is posed and students	Spider Web Discussion: Teachers Can Empower Students to Lead the	

	engage in a whole group dialogue, while the teacher maps the discussion with discourse codes in order to collect data and provide immediate feedback. The SPIDER Web discussion holds students right in the center of the learning, and helps them take ownership of their learning, while holding them accountable for participating.	Discussion, Think Critically, and Make Meaning in the Classroom Alexis Wiggins Wiki	During dialogues, students actively elaborate on each others' ideas rather than merely responding to the teacher's prompt. It calls for temporarily suspending judgments, revealing assumptions and biases for reevaluation, and causes introspection on one's own position.
Inner Outer Circle	A dialogue that gives students a chance to talk in the inner circle and act as focused listeners to provide peer feedback on conversational skills/behaviors in the outer circle; This type of dialogue gives students the opportunity to respond to questions and/or discuss information with a variety of peers in a structured manner.	Inner-Outer Circle	
Strategies for Debate			
Name	Description	Resources	Use
InterTeam Debate	A debate structure that allows all students to participate.	Team Debate Instructions	Debates are used to evaluate the perspectives of two opposing viewpoints. In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments. Debates defend assumptions as truth, and are oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
Four Corners Debate	A debate structure that requires students to show their position on a specific statement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) by standing in a particular corner of the room. This activity elicits the participation of all students by requiring everyone to take a position. This debate strategy can be used as a warm-up activity by asking students to respond to a	Education World Teaching Strategy: Four Corners Facing History	

	statement about a topic they will be studying, an effective follow-up activity by asking students to apply what they have learned when framing their arguments, or as a pre-writing activity to elicit arguments and evidence prior to essay writing.		
Strategies for Deliberation			
Name	Description	Resources	Use
Deliberation	A highly scaffolded civil discussion, which demands engaged participation from every student in the room, used to explore controversial topics, ensure a “best case fair hearing” for the issue, followed by informed decision making, and build consensus among students.	Street Law: Deliberations	Deliberation is used to help opposing viewpoints gain an appreciation for each other’s perspectives. Deliberations require students to work together to reach consensus on an issue and come up with a collaborative solution, and use open-ended questions that do not have simple or “right” answer. Deliberations are helpful for Helps students to develop skills in research, reasoning, and data analysis, and deepen understanding of a topic or concept.
Question Formulation Technique	Students are given a stimulus, which they then respond to using questions only. They hone their questions to make them more thoughtful, which then serves as a starting point for research.	Summary of the Procedure for the QFT	