**Planning Student-Led Discussions Using Academic Language**

1. After students read text(s), ask them to create questions about it; you could provide some suggested topics, like *theme, new vocabulary, figurative language, writer’s craft/style/voice, etc. Pull ideas from Common Core. You could also let students choose topics of their own, like “real-world connections” or “character development.”*

\*Note: If students are not confident creating their own questions, teach a mini-lesson using the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) that is highly engaging and low-prep. You could even teach this technique using images, music, film clips, or other art forms. See Procedure sheet and student handout.

1. Once students know the question parameters or topics, they could individually or in pairs/small groups create questions using the stems provided on the Language for Academic Discussions card. You might ask students to create a question from EACH of the categories on the card OR you could concentrate on one area, depending upon what you want students to do with the text.
2. You could provide a “discussion preparation” graphic organizer on which to write these questions. You might even collect this so you can make sure EVERY student is prepared to participate in the discussion. Additionally, you want to make sure you have vetted the questions (e.g. Are they clear? Do they use the academic stems? Are they rigorous, promoting interesting discussion?).
3. Decide the best format for discussion:
* **Whole group** – In this format, you might divide the class in half – Question Askers and Question Answerers. You might even choose a specific area on the Language for Academic Discussions card to practice (like Elaborate and Clarify). Set expectations for raising hands (or not), time, etc. When you hold the discussion, remind students that you as teacher are NOT there to ask or to answer their questions; students must take charge and lead the discussion. Your role is to monitor behaviors, quality of discussion, redirect – to assess student performance. Consider using a checklist to assign students grades for their participation (See Student Discussion Assessment). If you go this route, be sure to explain the criteria first; you may even want to post it on a wall or board. It is prudent to let students practice using the Language for Academic Discussions before assessing them. At first, their conversation may be stiff and slow-going. With your feedback and encouragement, however, they should improve quickly. ASK students what is challenging, awkward, etc. Brainstorm ways to improve TOGETHER.
* **Whole group variation** – Socratic Seminar or Fishbowl. See Procedural Options for Socratic Seminars and/or Fishbowl Strategies for Student Discussions). This handout outlines an easy procedure that involves both speakers and listeners acting as “coaches” for the speakers. There are also student handouts that accompany the Procedures sheet.
* **Small groups** – You could create groups of 3-4 students based on readiness, interest, or ability (differentiated groups based on your purposes). Next, you could assign ALL groups the same color on the Language for Academic Discussions student card to practice; you will easily “hear” if students are on track, discussing what you’ve asked AND practicing the academic language. Once you are satisfied with their progress, you could move to a different color. You might END with WHOLE-GROUP discussion and utilize the pink area, Synthesize Conversation, to wrap up the small group talk.
1. Discussions can be opportunities to formatively assess speaking and listening standards; they can also be the

 basis for larger writing assignments or the basis for research projects.

* At the end of the discussion, ask students to take out paper and ***individually*** respond to one or more of the Synthesize Conversation stems (pink area) on the card. You will quickly find out how well students paid attention, got the gist of the discussion, and made connections.
* During the Discussion activity, you could stop every 7 minutes or so (after working on one conversation skill) and ask students to take notes on a graphic organizer about what they have learned so far. Once you work through all the skills on the card, students should have a much broader grasp of the text and related ideas. You could collect and grade this or require that students use it for a larger assignment. See below.
* Finally, you could require students to use their discussion notes to answer a writing prompt – making sure to get to the “application of new ideas.” You could also ask them to create more questions, based on their discussion, to research. Students can amend their notes, as needed.

Wendy R. Waller, 2017