

# Discussion Web

## Description

This strategy promotes critical thinking by encouraging students to take a position for or against a particular point of view and requires them to establish and support evidence for their selected point of view based on their reading of narrative or expository texts. (Duthie, 1986)

## Purpose

Use *during* or *after* reading one or more texts to:

- Provide a framework for analyzing an issue by citing evidence for or against a point of view before coming to a personal viewpoint
- Develop students' ability to draw conclusions based upon evidence, not opinion
- Provide opportunities for active discussion and collaboration
- Help students organize ideas for writing and use evidence to support their point of view
- Encourage the use of multiple resources to determine a conclusion
- Develop appreciation for diversity and understanding that there are two or more sides to every question
- Help students refine their thinking by listening to opposing information or ideas

## Directions

1. Choose, or have students choose, an issue with opposing viewpoints.
2. Locate, or have students locate, a variety of resources that describe the issue.
3. Provide, or have students create, a guiding question to focus the discussion.
4. Have students work alone or in pairs to complete both sides of the discussion web, note text title and page numbers where they found the evidence, and form a tentative conclusion. Encourage them to be open-minded and suspend their personal judgment during the data collection.
5. Have two pairs work together to review their discussion webs and add additional arguments. Have the four students discuss all the evidence and come to consensus about the strongest point of view, based on the evidence (not personal opinion).
6. Have students create a conclusion that summarizes the group's thinking and write it at the bottom of the group discussion web. Encourage them to avoid biased language.
7. Have each small group report their conclusions to the whole class. They should mention any dissenting viewpoints within their group. Limit the report to three minutes so all groups have time to present.
8. Have each student review his/her own tentative conclusion about the guiding question and then complete a one paragraph quick write that states the conclusion, citing the three to five key facts or reasons that support the conclusion. This individual response will help both the teacher and the student assess whether the student's conclusion is based on evidence provided in text as well as their prior background knowledge and experience.

## Extensions

- Have students write a personal reflection about how the issue has impacted their lives or the lives of others they know.
- Have students write a response supporting the opposite point of view, using the opposing evidence from the Discussion Web.
- Have students do a formal debate or "town meeting" discussion. If possible, present to an authentic audience and solicit feedback.

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### Cross Content Sample

<p><b>English Language Arts</b></p> <p><i>Before and during</i> reading and writing about a controversial issue in today's world</p> <p>Create a variety of prompts about controversial issues for students to independently research and locate information on both sides of the issue, recording it on the Discussion Web in preparation for writing a persuasive essay that fairly portrays both sides.</p>	<p><b>Mathematics</b></p> <p><i>Before, during, and after</i> reading an introductory chapter about statistics applied to real life</p> <p>To introduce statistics, have students gather statistical information online and from newspapers and magazines around a topic of interest, such as sports, elections, or health issues, and form a hypothesis. Provide a Discussion Web template for them to record notes for and against their hypothesis when reading the articles and the text chapter on statistics.</p> <p>After reading, have students form a conclusion based on the Discussion Web information and be prepared to justify their point of view based on the statistical evidence.</p>
<p><b>Science</b></p> <p><i>Before, during, and after</i> reading online resources about space science</p> <p>Provide a controversial prompt to stimulate students thinking, such as "The United States should cancel its space program." Have students take pro and con notes on the Discussion Web template as they read various online resources in preparation for writing an editorial expressing their viewpoints that will be sent to NASA or the U.S. Congress.</p>	<p><b>Social Studies</b></p> <p><i>Before, during, and after</i> reading the U.S. Constitution</p> <p>Have students create their own prompt to analyze both sides of a constitutional issue affecting their lives or the world, then research text and online sources to find data supporting or refuting the issue using the Discussion Web format.</p>

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