

Tips for Facilitating a Meaningful Common Reading Discussion

One of the most important goals of the Synergy Common Reading Experience is to get students (and faculty) talking about important issues and themes as presented in the chosen book. Freshman Seminar instructors can help to facilitate and demonstrate critical thinking and challenge students to think beyond their comfort zones. Here are some tips for facilitating a successful discussion on the Common Reading book. These tips are also appropriate for most any classroom conversation.

- **Be prepared** - It is important that you read the book in advance and have some possible issues and questions identified ahead of time. There are numerous discussion questions in the UNI textbook and online at www.uncw.edu/commonreading/.
- **Have students prepare something** – Require a journal entry to be due on the day you will start your discussion. Students will have already had time to process their thoughts and will be more likely to participate in discussion. They can also be called upon easily.
- **Response Cards** – Give each student an index card (or scrap paper). Ask them to briefly write down their questions, their thoughts, and/or what they want to talk about. Have them turn in cards. You can then plan your discussion accordingly for a future class.
- **Group discussions** – Have students pair up or get in small groups to discuss their thoughts before returning to the entire class to report their conclusions. You could give each group a set of questions, a specific topic, or leave it open.
- **Use a common experience as an icebreaker** – Reflecting on real life experience is meaningful to students and encourages participation.
- **Listen** – Attend to students' ideas and feelings. Don't allow other students to interrupt.
- **Use open-ended questions** such as "What is your opinion about...? Or "What are the causes of...?" rather than questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
- **Pause after questions** – Students need time to think. Give "wait time" before you recognize or call on a student.
- **Rephrase questions** – If students don't respond, try saying it a different way.
- **Ask for examples and support for opinions** – Probing deeper gets students to think. Ask for parts of the book that support their ideas.
- **Get others to respond** – After a student shares his/her ideas, ask others to respond with their point of view.
- **Encourage all students to participate** – Solicit responses from non-talkers. Watch for nonverbal clues that students who do not participate much have something to say, and then call on them.
- **Test consensus** – Be careful of premature consensus before an issue has been explored. Restate the conclusion and ask if anyone has a different view.
- **Summarize** – Provide a summary or conclusions as appropriate, at transition points during the discussion and at the end.