

FISHBOWL AND HOT SEAT

Fishbowl

The fishbowl is a very strong peer learning strategy in which some participants are in an outer circle and one or more are in the center of the outer circle. In all fishbowl activities, both those in the inner and those in the outer circles have roles to fulfill. Fishbowls can be used to assess comprehension, as described in the Hot Seat variation below, to assess group work, to encourage constructive peer assessment, to discuss issues in the classroom, and to do a number of other things. Consider the activity and use it when you feel it is appropriate to meet your needs.

In its simplest form, arrange chairs in the classroom in two concentric circles. Explain the activity to the students and ensure that they understand the roles they will play. Make sure all students are seated in both the inside and the outside at some point, though they don't all have to be in both every time you do a fishbowl activity. Normally, either the person or people in the inner circle interact while those in the outer circle observe – with a list of specific aspects of the interaction to observe, or, the person or people in the inner circle are, in a sense, in the hot seat, being asked questions by those in the outer circle. An example of the latter is below in the Hot Seat activity. An example of the former follows.

Because group work can sometimes be a struggle, as students begin to engage in group projects, they are learning both the content for the project and how to act and participate in groups. One way to have students think about how people work best in groups is to create a fishbowl in which one group is in the fishbowl – or in the center circle. Before you begin, each of the students in the fishbowl has to be clear of his or her role in the group. Each of the students outside the fishbowl, or in the outer circle, has to be clear of what he or she is observing. You can do this however you think it will work best for your students. One idea is to have each student in the outer circle observing one student in the inner circle (you may have to double, triple, or quadruple up, but that's a good thing). Another way of doing this is to give each student in the outer circle a list of aspects of group interaction they should observe and comment on.

The most important thing is to remind all students that they will all be in the fishbowl at some point, so they have to keep in mind how they state their observations and criticisms. This does not mean that they shouldn't say things that are hard to say or hard to hear, just that they should say them in polite, constructive ways, rather than with the intention of hurting someone.

Hot Seat

The Hot Seat is a way to informally assess students' comprehension of something they have read or are in the process of reading. There are many variations on this strategy. The teacher can put a student in the hot seat and have other students quiz him or her on the reading. The students can also put the teacher in the hot seat. Students can be in the hot seat in groups and work together to answer questions. Another possibility is to have the person or people in the hot seat assume the role of a character or characters from a reading selection. As others ask questions, the hot sitter responds as he or she believes the character would. Encourage students to ask questions that predict future behavior or anything outside the actual text. Hot seat is a great way to clarify values and to get at the heart of a matter. The questions that are asked should be questions that

require more than a one word answer. They should be questions that require the sitter to contemplate an issue or idea. The hot seat is a great way to get to know the values and beliefs of students in your class, too. Save two minutes at the end of each period. Ask for a volunteer to go first. Tell them you will ask her 3 questions. She may answer or pass. Then the class may ask her 3 questions. She may answer or pass. Finally, the hot sitter may ask the teacher one question. You may also answer or pass.

Questions students love to answer (Be creative and make up some of your own!):

1. If you were at a party which room would you most likely be found in and why?
2. You are walking down the street and find a million dollars in a bag. If you take it, someone on the other side of the world will die (no, you do not know that person.) Do you take the money? Why or why not?
3. You are stranded on a desert island and you can have only one thing with you. What would it be and why?
4. If you were a cereal, what would you be and why?
5. Describe the weirdest dream you've ever had.
6. What's your favorite toothpaste? Why?
7. Your mother is dying. The local pharmacy has the drug that will cure her, but you do not have money to pay for it. Do you steal the drug? Why or why not?

These questions are also great questions to have students answer as the character from a story or book they are reading. They help students to identify with characters and extend their knowledge and understanding of who the characters are, based on what they know of the character from the text.