

## PLANNING ACTIVITIES: SOME GUIDELINES

### **Planning an efficient activity:**

*Activities are most effective when used with a learning objective in mind. Here are some questions to ask yourself when deciding whether and which activities to use (questions are formulated with Advanced Section planning objectives in mind).*

1. What skills do you hope students will acquire in this section, and across section this semester?
2. What activities can help students acquire these skills?
3. How can you use activities sequentially over the course of the semester, to help students reinforce and build upon skills already acquired while also fostering the development of new skills?
4. Have you used a range of activities over the course of the semester, to keep students interested while appealing to the range of learning styles that your students bring to class?

Other issues to keep in mind when planning activities include the *Setting*....

- Will students work individually?
- Will they work in small groups?
- Will the class work as one large group?

...and the *Timing* of the activity.

- When, during the 50 minutes, will the activity be used?
- At the beginning?
- At the end? Can the activity be carried over as homework or be completed the next time the class meets?
- Timing also refers to thoughtful advanced planning of sequential activities over the course of the semester.

### **Effective Delivery of Activities:**

- Explain objectives/cognitive goals of the task (In doing this I hope you will learn x, develop y skill, etc.)
- Provide specific instructions for the task
- Provide specific content: what 'tools are they supposed use?
- Give specific standards: what should they aim for? (fastest group, longest list, most original answer, etc.)
- Define specific time & structure
- Determine specific product: what are they supposed to produce?
- Monitor how groups/pairs are progressing

### **And finally, Miscellaneous helpful hints:**

- 1) Give students a chance to reflect on question in advance and write down their ideas
- 2) Give instructions first, then the specific task (otherwise they'll start the task without instructions).
- 3) When the volume in the room decreases bring the class back together.
- 4) If a group finishes early, have them compare with another group who's finished too.

## **A. CLASSROOM GAMES**

The reasons for using "games" in the classroom are manifold, and chief among them is relief from the standard question-and-discussion lesson plan. Even when the "normal" lesson plan is going well, taking the class in a new direction can give different students a chance to shine. Games cannot occupy all of your class time, but a classroom entirely without them is less interesting, for both student and instructor.

In most cases, games work best if you explain all of the rules clearly before selling the students to work on the game. It's also helpful to use groups or teams where possible (keep this in mind when designing your own "game")—partly to engage the natural competitive spirit, but mainly so there's still discussion during game time.

### ***Debate***

Stage a debate in class exploiting any arguable divide in the day's material. Give the teams 10 or 15 minutes to prepare, and put them into argument with each other. (This can work just as well with arguments you invent, such as "Joyce's *Araby* does a better job of describing a place than Woolf's *Kew Gardens*" or "Hamlet should have killed Claudius sooner" or "Kennedy is an over-rated statesman.")

### ***Interview Or Role-Play***

Members of the class take the part of authors, characters, or other figures implied by the day's material. (Probably best if you give the volunteers more than a few minutes to prepare.) A variation on this would be to make the interview a "psychological assessment," etc. This might especially be useful if you have one or two talkative "expert" students and want to put the rest of the class in the driver's seat.

### ***Free writing***

Start the class with free writing (or even drawing). You might ask students to begin by drawing a picture or a diagram of a colonial plantation, then discuss what historians can learn about the past by studying things like architectural or spatial arrangements. (One might accomplish the same thing asking the students to illustrate what they think made the key moment in a text. Or have them write a list of 5 words that describe the reading for that day. Or have them write questions they would ask the author if the author were there in the room.)

### ***Props or visual aids***

Let them spark discussion (or free-writing). In a history class, one might bring in objects or texts from the period if possible. One might also lead off writing courses by asking students to describe an image in postcards (dealt around the table like playing cards). One might also bring in several illustrations of the same scene in a novel, photos of an important site, or simply portraits of key figures.

### ***Scavenger Hunt***

As an optional "bonus" part of the reading, give the students a series of scavenger hunts: objectives within the library, within your anthology, or (I suppose) on the web. If you don't mean for the students to use only the internet, you must specify this. They are very apt with internet with the internet searches and will find Google more convenient than a trip to the stacks.

## **"Car, Boat, Plane"**

Put three (or more) key concepts or terms on the board, and ask the students to say which one "doesn't belong" in the set and why. Along similar lines, one might isolate two or more passages from a text that seem to be in conflict, and ask the students how the passages can be reconciled. This can be a quick, free-standing exercise, or the springboard for a much longer discussion.

## **Pass it On**

One good way to build free-writing or brain-storming games is to have students add to index cards they keep passing in one direction. First they might each write a major theme from the day's reading, then pass to the right. Next, they read the theme that has been passed to them, and write a question for an essay topic that treats that theme. They might then write a thesis statement answering that question. (If you were really doing this with theses, you'd want to debrief afterwards.)

## **Think-Pair-Share:**

Participants take 1 minute to think through a given question. They then pair up with a partner for a longer period of time (2 minutes) to discuss their ideas. Finally, all students convene as a larger classroom and share what they have learned. (Adapt times as necessary).

## **Kinesthetics:**

If you are trying to teach a process (such as photosynthesis, the development of an idea over time, etc.) you can assign individuals to each of the steps of the process and then have them interact with one another to play out the process. For instance, if you want students to learn that oxygen is a byproduct of photosynthesis, you can literally "walk" them through the steps of how water and carbon dioxide are converted into the byproducts of photosynthesis (sugars and oxygen), with different people playing different roles (i.e., the necessary biological substrates and/or the different parts of the water molecule) in this conversion.

## **B. GROUP PUZZLE / JIGSAW METHOD**

<http://www.jigsaw.org>      <http://www.pwcs.edu/curriculum/sol/Jigsaw.html>

This is a more complex activity that requiring more preparation by the TF, preparation that is rewarded by the most students' engagement in and enjoyment of this task.

### **Part I: Expert Groups**

The students work in groups on a text, discussing a set of questions. Each group is given a different set of questions. This makes the members of the respective groups experts in their respective fields of action.

### **Part 2: Expert Meeting**

You form new groups that will have one expert on each of the set of questions in it. The students report the results of their previous discussion to the others in the new group. In this way the students share their knowledge about the different fields.

### **Advantage of the Group Puzzle**

- Students will work more on the text by themselves, without your simply presenting it to them
- Students will feel more independent of you
- Discussing in as small group will make students feel less inhibited

- Because every single student will have to report about his/her questions to a group that doesn't know anything about it, each student will have to take responsibility for his/her part—and absolutely everybody will be involved in the action.

**Example:**

**Part I: Expert Groups (Theory Groups, Discourse Groups)**

- Group "Hearts": Discusses the questions 1-3.  
 Group "Diamonds": Discusses the questions 4-6.  
 Group "Spades": Discusses the questions 7-9.  
 Group "Clubs": Discusses the questions 10-12.

A♥	K♥	A♦	K♦	A♠	K♠	A♣	K♣
Q♥	J♥	Q♦	J♦	Q♠	J♠	Q♣	J♣

**Part 2: Expert Meeting (Consulting Firms, Problem-Solving Teams)**

- Group "Aces": Each Ace reports the result of their first to this new group (the Ace of Hearts reports about questions 1-3, the Ace of Diamonds reports about questions 4-6, etc.)  
 Group "Kings": Each King reports the result of their first to this new group (the King of Hearts reports about questions 1-3, the King of Diamonds reports about questions 4-6, etc.)  
 Group "Queens": Each Queen reports the result of their first to this new group (the Queen of Hearts reports about questions 1-3, the Queen of Diamonds reports about questions 4-6, etc.)  
 Group "Jacks": Each Jack reports the result of their first to this new group (the Jack of Hearts reports about questions 1-3, the Jack of Diamonds reports about questions 4-6, etc.)

A♥	A♦	K♥	K♦	Q♥	Q♦	J♥	J♦
A♠	A♣	K♠	K♣	Q♠	Q♣	J♠	J♣