


How to Have a Silent Discussion

Adapted from
“Facing History and Ourselves”
<http://bit.ly/1hhp7DN>

What is it?

 “A discussion strategy [that] uses writing and silence as tools to help students explore a topic in-depth.”

(Facing History and Ourselves)

Why use it?

- Uses writing to slow down students' thinking process and gives them an opportunity to focus on the views of others.
- Creates a visual record of students' thoughts and questions.
- Helps engage shy students who are [initially] not as likely to participate in a verbal discussion.
- With repetition, builds students' comfort, confidence, and skill in verbal discussion.

(adapted from Facing History and Ourselves)

How does it work?

1. Determine prompts in advance to focus the silent discussion (e.g., question, quotation from assigned reading, visual image related to the topic, etc.). Put each prompt in the center of a large sheet of paper. Post the paper in the center of a table or on the wall.
2. SILENTLY, each small group writes their responses to the prompt directly on the big paper.

How does it work?

3. After groups have completed their responses, SILENTLY distribute 5-6 sticky notes to each student.
4. Convene a Gallery Walk. SILENTLY, students use their sticky notes to respond to OTHER GROUP'S papers. They can draw arrows to connect comments, etc.
5. After students have responded to each group, they return to their own paper to SILENTLY read the comments.

How does it work?

6. THE SILENCE IS BROKEN.

7. Facilitate a whole-class discussion by asking each group to share what they have learned about the original prompt posted to their big sheet of paper.

8. OPTIONAL: As a ticket out the door, ask students to reflect in writing on what they learned from the discussion.