

## TEACHER DIRECTIONS

# Fishbowl

CCSS: RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.6, RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.3, SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.6

Fishbowl is an engaging and student-centered strategy that builds comprehension while developing group discussion skills. In the inner circle, or “fishbowl,” students conduct a text-based discussion and practice responding to multiple points of view; students in the outer circle listen to the discussion and take notes. Observations from students in the outer circle provide insight into what makes for effective discussions. Research supports the use of fishbowls as a particularly effective way to engage students with a range of abilities and in multiple settings.

The fishbowl structure lends itself well to discussions about *The New Jim Crow*. By providing all students both a speaking and listening role and a stake in the discussion, a fishbowl sets up students to be both consumers and producers of ideas and to find a balance in how they “speak up” and “step back.” The observation aspect of the activity gives students a forum for establishing appropriate ways to participate in discussions. If used on a consistent basis, fishbowl discussions can establish boundaries and norms critical for effective conversations.

1. Have students bring their copies of the excerpt to the discussion, along with the notes they took during reading and two or three critical questions they created on their own.
2. Select four or five students to join the fishbowl group. Only students in the fishbowl are allowed to talk. Have those students ask and answer their prepared questions.
3. Instruct the outer circle to remain quiet, observe and take notes on the content and process of the inner circle’s discussion. If you have paired students, have one take notes on the other’s performance using the peer tracking worksheet.
4. As facilitator, the teacher only participates to pose questions along the way, prompt deeper discussion and make sure students’ comments are relevant.
5. Rotate students in and out of the fishbowl through the course of the discussion. Set up a procedure ahead of time so students know to expect this rotation.
6. Close by having students summarize the discussion. Ask what they learned and how they better understand the excerpt after discussing it with their peers. Finally, ask what could be improved in the next fishbowl.

**English language learners:** This strategy is appropriate for intermediate English language learners (level three or above). Fishbowl is a low-stakes, low-anxiety strategy with a high verbal communication structure. English language learners may need extended practice identifying “look-for’s” and other characteristics of meaningful text discussions. Consider offering students the option to record the dialogue, so they may listen to it more than once.



## FISHBOWL DISCUSSION

# Peer Tracking Sheet

**Observer** (*outer circle*): \_\_\_\_\_

**Peer** (*inner circle*): \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Track your partner by using tally marks to keep track of how many times he or she did each of the following activities during the fishbowl discussion.

LOOK-FOR'S	TRACKING NOTES
Answered questions with evidence from <i>The New Jim Crow</i>	
Asked questions that were grounded in <i>The New Jim Crow</i>	
Asked a clarifying question to help with understanding	
Used an example from personal experience to make a connection to or support a claim	
Expressed agreement with another's view and verbalized why	
Expressed disagreement with another's view and verbalized why	
Listened actively and respectfully to other students' ideas	
Seemed open to ideas that conflicted with his or her own	

**Directions:** Circle the number that best describes your partner’s participation in the fishbowl discussion. Be prepared to back up your score with specific evidence from the discussion.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Answered questions with evidence from the text	5	4	3	2	1
Asked questions that were grounded in the text	5	4	3	2	1
Listened actively and respectfully to other students’ ideas	5	4	3	2	1
Openly considered ideas that conflicted with his or her own ideas	5	4	3	2	1
Responded to others with appropriate questions	5	4	3	2	1

**Notes/Comments**

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