“Teach Each Other” Discussion

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDERNSTERN ARE DEAD
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FIRST BLACK CAT EDITION 1968
TEACH EACH OTHER DISCUSSION

CONTEXT:
Students have been thinking about the theme of death in this book; they have finished the play by now and have discussed death as a class with you, the teacher. Now it is time for them to take the ideas they have developed and share with one another.

PURPOSE:
This strategy is a form of discussion group in which the teacher becomes a shadow while the students teach each other. Unlike traditional discussion groups wherein the students look to the teacher for answers and leadership, here the teacher gives students complete ownership of the discussion, which is based on a common reading or set of statements. This is a way to increase student involvement in talking and participation and allows the teacher to observe and take notes on who participates and how often.

DIRECTIONS:

MATERIALS NEEDED: Rules sheet for overhead, cue sheets, reading quotes.
TIME: 35 minutes (Be flexible enough to let the discussion continue longer if it is going in a good direction)

STEP ONE:

INTRODUCTION
Introduce the strategy by first asking the students how discussions usually go in class. Talk about the theme of death in the play and how heavily it has been in the play so far. Tell the class that today’s discussion will be different than usual discussions in that the students are going to teach each other. Place the following rules on the overhead:

1. Courtesy: In order for each student to feel comfortable, courtesy is essential.
2. Do not look at the teacher: The discussion is for your benefit, not the teacher’s.
3. Tolerate silence: It takes time to think of what or how to say something.

STEP TWO:

READING
The cue sheet is a sheet with questions on it which will help the students think about other students’ comments and how to respond. Once you have passed these out, pass out a sheet with passage(s) from the play and questions or statements which go along with it(them); these will drive the discussion. Read over the passages with the students and tell them to decide which points they would like to emphasize.
STEP THREE:

DISCUSSION
Arrange the students’ desks into a circle around the room so they can all see one another. When a student wishes to make a comment, have them raise their hand: Holding up a fist indicates that this is their first comment; one finger indicates that they have spoken one time; two fingers mean they have spoken two times, and so on. The person who has just made a comment is to choose the next person to speak by deciding who has spoken the least amount of times. Their comments need to be centered on their own ideas, not just “That was interesting” or “I agree.” If students wish to make that type of comment, they are to back it up with what they agree or disagree with and why. Only one person can talk at a time. You will ask who wants to start the discussion and then move to the back of the classroom to observe and to mark who has participated.

STEP FOUR:

WRITING
At the end of the discussion time, bring the lesson to a conclusion by asking the students to write a journal response or paper about death and the discussion that has just taken place. Have their ideas changed? Been reinforced by something someone else said?

ASSESSMENT
Who participated in the discussion and how was their understanding of the topic? Were the comments general or insightful? The writing portion also helps with assessment; were students able to articulate ideas with greater force or support after the discussion?