

# DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

This section provides descriptions of a variety of strategies and activities that Facing History and Ourselves has found effective in facilitating meaningful discussion about sensitive topics. The primary goal of all of these strategies is to provide a structure for group discussion and analysis that enables every voice to be heard and encourages active listening by all members of the group. After all, the research on bullying tells us that it is in just these types of environments that bullying is least likely to take hold.

The descriptions of these strategies are written for teachers to use with students, but it is our experience that these strategies are effective with groups of adults as well. The Classroom Suggestions that follow many readings in previous sections of this guide reference specific strategies from this section. Please keep in mind that these are only suggestions. We encourage teachers and facilitators to browse through this section, familiarize themselves with many of the strategies included, and use their best judgment to determine which are best suited for their groups.



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**The following strategies and activities are included in this section:**

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# Fishbowl

## Rationale

Fishbowl is a teaching strategy that helps students practice being contributors and listeners in a discussion. Students ask questions, present opinions, and share information when they sit in the “fishbowl” circle, while students on the outside of the circle listen carefully to the ideas presented and pay attention to process. Then the roles reverse. This strategy is especially useful when you want to make sure all students participate in the discussion, when you want to help students reflect on what a “good discussion” looks like, and when you need a structure for discussing controversial or difficult topics.

## Procedure

### 1. Selecting a topic for the fishbowl

Almost any topic is suitable for a fishbowl discussion. The most effective prompts (question or text) do not have one right answer, but rather allow for multiple perspectives and opinions. The fishbowl is an excellent strategy to use when discussing dilemmas, for example.

### 2. Setting up the room

A fishbowl requires a circle of chairs (the “fishbowl”) and enough room around the circle for the remaining students to observe what is happening in the fishbowl. Sometimes teachers place enough chairs for half of the students in the class to sit in the fishbowl, while other times teachers limit the chairs in the fishbowl. Typically six to twelve chairs allows for a range of perspectives while still allowing each student an opportunity to speak. The observing students often stand around the fishbowl.

### 3. Preparation

Like many structured conversations, fishbowl discussions are most effective when students have had a few minutes to prepare ideas and questions in advance.

### 4. Discussing norms and rules of the discussion

There are many ways to structure a fishbowl discussion. Sometimes teachers have half the class sit in the fishbowl for 10–15 minutes and then say, “Switch,” at which point the listeners enter the fishbowl and the speakers become the audience. Another common fishbowl format is the “tap” system, where students on the outside of the fishbowl gently tap a student on the inside, indicating that they should switch roles. See the Variations section for more ideas about how to structure this activity.

Regardless of the particular rules you establish, you want to make sure these are explained to students beforehand. You also want to provide instructions for the students in the audience. What should they be listening for? Should they be taking notes? Before beginning the fishbowl, you may wish to review guidelines for having a respectful conversation. Sometimes teachers ask audience members to pay attention to how these norms are followed by recording specific aspects of the discussion process such as the number of interruptions, respectful or disrespectful language used, or speaking times (who is speaking the most? the least?).

### 5. Debriefing the fishbowl discussion

After the discussion, you can ask students to reflect on how they think the discussion went and what they learned from it. Students can also evaluate their participation as listeners and as participants. They could also provide suggestions for how to improve the quality of discussion in the future. These reflections can be in writing, or can be structured as a small or large group conversation.

## Variations

### A fishbowl for opposing positions

This is a type of group discussion that can be utilized when there are two distinct positions or arguments. Each group has an opportunity to discuss the issue while the other group observes. The goal of this technique is for one group to gain insight about the other perspective by having this opportunity to listen and formulate questions. After both sides have shared and listened, students are often given the opportunity to discuss their questions and ideas with students representing the other side of the argument.

### A fishbowl for multiple perspectives

This format allows students to look at a question or a text from various perspectives. First, assign perspectives to groups of students. These perspectives could represent the viewpoints of different historical figures, characters in a novel, social categories (e.g., young, old, male, female, working-class laborer, industrialist, peasant, noble, soldier, priest, etc.), or political/philosophical points of view. Each group discusses the same question, event, or text representing their assigned perspective. The goal of this technique is for students to consider how perspective shapes meaning-making. After all groups have shared, students can be given the opportunity to discuss their ideas and questions with peers from other groups.

# Identity Charts<sup>1</sup>

## Rationale

Identity charts are graphic tools that help students consider the many factors that shape who we are as individuals and as communities. They can be used to deepen students' understanding of themselves, groups, nations, and historical and literary figures. Identity charts will also help students think about the identities and experiences of the young people they watch in *BULLY*. There are several points in this guide when it might be helpful to have students create identity charts. By comparing charts they make for themselves with those they make for people in the film, students may begin to make more explicit connections with those victimized by bullying. They may also begin to appreciate the differences that exist in their community that might make one more vulnerable to being bullied.

## Procedure

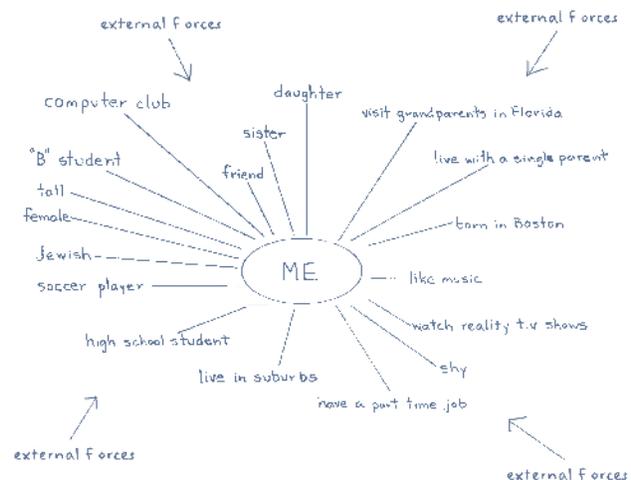
### Creating an identity chart for yourself

Before creating identity charts, you might have the class brainstorm categories we consider when thinking about the question, "Who am I?" such as our role in a family (e.g., daughter, sister, mother, etc.), our hobbies and interests (e.g., guitar player, football fan, etc.), our background (e.g., religion, race, nationality, hometown, or place of birth), and our physical characteristics. It is often helpful to show students a completed identity chart before they create one of their own.

Give students an opportunity to share their identity charts with one another, then follow up with a short discussion. What similarities do they notice between members of the class? What differences stand out? Are some differences more important than others? Why or why not?

### Creating identity charts for people, groups, or communities in the film

First, ask students to write the name of the person, group, or community in the center of a piece of paper. Then, as students watch the film or explore readings from this guide, they can look for evidence that helps



them answer the question, "Who is this person?" or "Who is this group?" Encourage students to include quotations from the film on their identity charts, as well as their own interpretations of the person or group. Students can complete identity charts individually or in small groups. Alternatively, students could contribute ideas to a class version of an identity chart that you keep on the classroom wall.

Give students an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their observations. Did they notice any similarities between themselves and the people and communities in the film? Of the characteristics they recorded for young people in the film, are there any that make them more likely to be picked on or bullied?

## Variation: Identity Boxes

People have two identities: what the outside world thinks of us and an internal identity (the traits we ascribe to ourselves). To illuminate this concept, students can create identity boxes, for themselves or for people in the film. The inside of the box contains words and images that represent how we describe ourselves. The outside of the box contains words and images that represent how we think others view us.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Activity adapted from *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Facing History and Ourselves, 1994), 8.

# Attribute Linking

## Rationale

This activity is designed to help students discuss difficult issues, while also recognizing that they likely represent different perspectives. Attribute Linking can help students to define, clarify, and personalize the roles of *upstander* and *bystander*. By having students look for attributes they share before they discuss issues on which they may differ, the exercise emphasizes commonality over differences and helps students recognize the value of negotiation. Finally, this exercise builds trust and contributes to a climate of openness.

While the procedure suggested below explores the roles of upstander and bystander, this strategy may also be adapted to explore the roles of *bully* and *victim*. It is important to help students understand that *bully*, *victim*, *upstander*, and *bystander* are all roles that we each play in different situations at different times and are not fixed parts of our identities.

## Procedure

1. Ask students to find someone in the room (partner #1) with their same hair color. Have these pairs of students exchange definitions of *bystander* and, if time permits, provide examples. Before proceeding, make sure each pair of students has reached a mutually agreed upon definition of *bystander* to take to their next partner.
2. Ask students to find a different person in the room (partner #2) with their same eye color. Have these new pairs share the definitions of *bystander* they each brought from their first partner. Then, have these new pairs exchange stories of incidents in their lives when they witnessed bullying and acted as a bystander. If students cannot think of an incident they witnessed, they may share one they saw on television or read about in the newspaper.

Ask each pair to make a list of at least three reasons bystanders might choose to do nothing when they witness bullying. Have students use felt-tip markers to record these lists on colored construction paper to post around the room.

3. Ask students to find a new partner in the room (partner #3) with the same size hand. Students must measure their hands, palm-to-palm, in order to find a match. Have these pairs of students exchange definitions of *upstander* and, if time permits, provide examples. Before proceeding, make sure each pair of students has reached a mutually agreed upon definition of *upstander* to take to their next partner.
4. Ask students to find a new partner (partner #4) who is their same height. Once again, students must measure themselves by standing back-to-back with potential partners until they find a match. Have these new pairs share the definitions of *upstander* they each brought from their previous partner. Then, have students exchange stories about incidents involving bullying in which they or someone they know acted as an upstander. If students cannot think of an incident they witnessed, they may share one they saw on television or read about in the newspaper.

Ask each pair to make a list of at least three actions upstanders might take when they witness bullying. Have students use felt-tip markers to record these lists on colored construction paper to post around the room.

5. After posting their bystander and upstander lists, have all students read through their classmates' lists and discuss them in simultaneous, informal conversations with their partners and other classmates. Once all have finished posting their definitions and had a chance to read the others', debrief the activity.
6. It is critical to debrief this activity thoroughly. The discussion should include the following points:
  - the variety of reasons bystanders do not act
  - the variety of actions an upstander might take to help
  - the fact that we "play" both roles in different situations at different times
  - the fact that we can "play" the roles of bully and victim in different situations at different times

# Big Paper

## Rationale

This discussion strategy uses writing and silence as tools to help students explore a topic in depth. Having a written conversation with peers slows down students' thinking process and gives them an opportunity to focus on the views of others. This strategy also creates a visual record of students' thoughts and questions that can be referred to later. Using the *Big Paper* strategy can help engage shy students who are not as likely to participate in a verbal discussion.

## Procedure

### 1. Preparation

First, you will need to select the “stimulus”—the material that students will respond to. As the stimulus for a Big Paper activity, teachers have used questions, quotations, historical documents, and excerpts from novels, poetry, or images. For instance, if using this strategy to discuss the reading “The Power of Friendship,” you might print and cut out the quotations from the film (from Kelby, Trey, and Alex and his mother) to use as the stimulus. You might also choose to use any of the Connections questions in this guide as a stimulus for this activity.

Groups can be given the same stimulus for discussion, but more often they are given different texts related to the same theme. This activity works best when students are working in pairs or triads. Make sure that all students have a pen or marker. Some teachers have students use different colored markers to make it easier to see the back-and-forth flow of a conversation. Each group also needs a “big paper” (typically a sheet of poster paper) that can fit a written conversation and added comments. In the middle of the page, tape or write the “stimulus” (image, quotation, excerpt, etc.) that will be used to spark the students' discussion.

### 2. The importance of silence

Inform the class that this activity will be completed in silence. All communication is done in writing. Students should be told that they will have time to speak in pairs and in large groups later. Go over all of the instructions at the beginning so that they do not ask questions during the activity. Also, before the activity starts, the teacher should ask students if they have questions, to minimize the chance that students will interrupt the silence once it has begun. You can also remind students of their task as they begin each new step.

### 3. Comment on your Big Paper

Each group receives a Big Paper and each student a marker or pen. The groups read the text in silence. After students read the text, they may comment on the text and ask questions of each other in writing on the Big Paper. The written conversation must start on the text but can stray to wherever the students take it. If someone in the group writes a question, another member of the group should address the question by writing on the Big Paper. Students can draw lines connecting a comment to a particular question. Make sure students know that more than one of them can write on the Big Paper at the same time. The teacher can determine the length of this step, but it should be at least 15 minutes.

### 4. Comment on other Big Papers

Still working in silence, the students leave their partner(s) and walk around reading the other Big Papers. Students bring their marker or pen with them and can write comments or further questions for thought on other Big Papers. Again, the teacher can determine the length of time for this step based on the number of Big Papers and his or her knowledge of the students.



# Think, Pair, Share

## Rationale

This discussion technique gives students the opportunity to thoughtfully respond to questions in written form and to engage in meaningful dialogues with other students around important issues.

Asking students to write and discuss ideas with a partner before sharing with the larger group gives students more time to compose their ideas. This format helps students build confidence, encourages greater participation, and often results in more thoughtful discussions. This strategy may be used to facilitate discussion around any Connections question in this guide.

## Procedure

### 1. Think

Have students reflect on a given question or write a response in their journals.

### 2. Pair

Have students pair up with one other student and share their responses.

### 3. Share

When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations. Alternatively, you could ask students to share what their partner said. In this way, this strategy focuses on students' skills as careful listeners.

# Improving the Script

## Rationale

BULLY includes a variety of exchanges between parents, school officials, and young people that many viewers will find unsatisfactory. While it is often easy to critique the responses to the bullying that young people experience in the film, it is perhaps more useful to think about what kinds of responses are most helpful and productive. In this Improving the Script activity, participants are asked to rewrite some of the dialogue from the film to reflect how they would like members of their community to respond to bullying. Consider using this activity with adults as well as students in your school community.

## Procedure

### 1. Selecting a scene

The reading “Adult Intervention” includes short passages of dialogue between school officials and students who have been bullied. Either can be used for this activity. Alternatively, students and adults may choose any scene from the movie in which they found an adult response to bullying to be unsatisfactory and create a short dialogue from scratch to reflect how the response could be improved.

### 2. Writing the script

In groups of two or three, participants can discuss what they find ineffective about the adult response in the scene they chose. Then, they should discuss how they would like the adult to have responded. Finally, they can work together to construct and script a better response.

### 3. Sharing and debrief

After reconvening, each small group can share with the whole their improved scripts. Participants can then discuss similarities and differences that emerge in their ideas about how adults can best respond to young people’s experiences of bullying.

# Save the Last Word for Me

## Rationale

Save the Last Word for Me is a discussion strategy that requires all students to participate as active speakers and listeners. Its clearly defined structure helps shy students share their ideas and ensures that frequent speakers practice being quiet. It is often used as a way to help students debrief a reading or film.

## Procedure

### 1. Preparation

Identify a reading or video excerpt that will serve as the catalyst for this activity.

### 2. Students read and respond to text

Have students read or view the selected text. Ask students to highlight three sentences that particularly stood out for them and write each sentence on the front of an index card. On the back they should write a few sentences explaining why they chose that quote—what it meant to them, reminded them of, etc. They may have connected it to something that happened to them in their own life, to a film or book they saw or read, or to something that happened in history or is happening in current events.

### 3. Sharing in small groups

Divide the students into groups of three, labeling one student A, one B, and the other C. Invite the A's to read one of their chosen quotations. Students B and C then discuss the quotation while student A remains silent. What do they think it means? Why do they think these words might be important? To whom? After several minutes, ask the A students to read the backs of their cards (or to explain why they picked the quotation), thus having “the last word.” This process continues with student B sharing and then student C.