

“Power Pair” Reading Activity:

Analyzing 1st Person Accounts of “Difficult History” Using Structured Reading Circles

Objective:

- To read, analyze and interpret primary documents dealing with personal experiences of events involving controversy and change in the civic life and history of a community
- To use discussion of past experiences to start peer-to-peer dialogue about related current issues

Materials needed: paired sets of texts; highlighters, pens/pencils, sticky notes; 30-45 minute

Overview of activity: Class uses a reading circle and structured dialogue activity to analyze and interpret a pair of primary documents about past events and to draw connections to current issues. Class divides into reading circles of 4-6 participants with 3 discussion leaders (see below.) Using the steps in the activity below, students will practice literacy and listening skills:

- identify important details,
- cite key quotes or passages,
- evaluate how the experience affected people,
- compare experiences & perspectives in stories,
- analyze what the pair of stories reveals: e.g. recurring themes? contrasting truths? hidden meanings? degrees of emotions? choices for actions? individual vs. institutional power?
- connect the stories to their own experiences and/or current issues,
- generate questions to explore the issues in continued conversations together.

Assign three participants an extra role during the reading circle: **Facilitators** give instructions at each step. **Tipsters** remind circle to “just quote highlighted words now”, “now say why those words seem especially important”, “raise hand if you highlighted it, too”, etc. **Clockwatchers** give heads up 1 min before next step.

Process: (Note: Following these steps carefully will allow more thoughtful and more open dialogue among students about difficult topics and controversial issues.)

1. (3 min) Read silently the first document only. Highlight words/phrases that “speak to you”.
2. (2-3 min) Take turns reading aloud one of the phrases you highlighted. *TIP: Just quote the words you highlighted; don’t add personal comments yet! It’s important to be able to*

re-tell the story in the author’s words! TIP: Raise hand when others read something you highlighted, too.

3. (4-6 min) Next, take turns sharing your personal reactions to those words and phrases. *TIP: Use that person’s story to share your own story.*
4. Now repeat same steps with 2nd document.
5. As you discuss, explore how the story in the second document affects your understanding of the story in the first document. Compare authors’ points of view or reactions of persons in the stories.
6. Closing (3-4 min) *TIP: It’s important to always end the circle with questions for further study & reflection. Stay open to learning more!*
7. Using sticky notes, write your response to one or more of the following prompts:

“After reading/hearing these stories, what questions does it make me ask:

- persons in the stories?
- the authors of the stories?
- my classmates and others?
- and myself, too?
- what action can I take now on these issues today?

8. Read aloud your “next questions” in your Circle (1-2 min), then attach sticky notes to file copy of Power Pair documents. Keep a record of questions raised by these stories.

Note: This activity was originally developed for the Civil Rights Memory Project at Little Rock Central High School in partnership with the Central High National Historic Site of the National Park Service. Students were reading classmates’ essays after interviews with family members about personal experiences involving civil and human rights.

*A team of student editors selected essays that were “especially important for others to know.” Their book was published by CALS Butler Center Books in 2010 (*Beyond Central, Toward Acceptance*). A second book was published in 2013 (*Mapping the Road to Change*).*

CALS continues as a community sponsor for the project. For more lesson plans, power pair sets, and student projects using oral history about civil/human rights, contact George West, CALS Education Outreach Coordinator at gwest@cals.org and also see the student-produced Memory Project website: www.lrchmemory.wix.com/lrch.

