

Responding to Readings¹

Students as Experts

Break-down the text and assign particularly difficult parts to specific students who are going to be the designated expert interpreters. They formulate answers to questions such as: “What does this add to what we have learned already?” or “How do we use this ‘language’ to talk about the overarching questions/themes of the class?”

Critics’ Argument

Give the students two divergent critical analyses of the text by different authors and ask them to take sides, put their chosen critic’s view in their own words, and explain why they favor one view over the other.

Role Playing

Students create short sketches in which they act out different perspectives on a theme or opposing positions in an argument. Students can also write and perform dialogues between thinkers/authors (say, Aristotle and Plato, Dante and Shakespeare, MLK & Malcolm X), characters from different novels or plays (Ophelia, Jane Austen, and Stephen Dedalus), etc. You can set parameters in terms of what the sketches must cover. For example, give students a list of themes, topics, etc. they are supposed to cover.

Multi-Media Pairings

Pair a text with a film, a piece of music, an image, a performance, and ask students to imagine how one medium can serve as an illustration or critical analysis of the other. Better not to choose adaptations of the text into other media but instead to purposefully pair the written text with visual/aural texts on seemingly unrelated subjects. For example, when discussing a reading on the topic of human rights, avoid screening a documentary on human rights but rather choose a conventional narrative film or an art film. By unsettling the students’ expectations, such pairings are likely to generate deeper and more creative reflection. You can also pair (popular) images of radically different or clashing content and ask students to find buried “iconographic” relationships.

¹ All activities adapted from the Pedagogical Guide of the University of Notre Dame’s College Seminar course, then directed by Professor Essaka Joshua.