

Using the Barometer Method

Purpose of Method

The barometer exercise is a great way to spark classroom discussion by leading students to take a stand (quite literally) in response to a statement or question about a text. Besides encouraging the students to explore their critique of the text more deeply, the Barometer method illustrates the range of opinion in the classroom, providing a springboard for further discussion.

In this exercise the students consider a statement or question that relates to a particular text. (For example, a statement relating to Genesis, chapter 3, might be, “Adam and Eve were equally responsible for the Fall.”) The students read the text (or listen as you read it), then stand between two signs representing opposite positions on the statement (e.g., “Agree” or “Disagree”) at a point that reflects their own opinion. When the exercise is over, the class comes together to discuss the statement or question in light of the text.

Materials You Will Need to Prepare Ahead of Time

- a statement or question you would like the students to share their opinion about
- copies of a short story, article, or document that relates to the statement you will be making (one for each student)
- two signs, one with the word *Agree* in large letters and the other with the word *Disagree* in large letters (depending on your topic, other terms may work better)
- a roll of masking tape

The Barometer Exercise in Steps

1. Post the *Agree* and *Disagree* signs on the wall some distance apart. Prepare a “yes or no” statement or question that you want students to consider as they read or listen to the text.
2. Distribute the copies of the story, article, or document. (Alternatively, read the text aloud to the students and then skip to step 4).
3. Instruct the students to read the text silently and allow 5 to 10 minutes for them to do so.
4. Ask the students to form an opinion regarding your statement or question. Do they agree or disagree with the statement in light of the text?
5. Encourage the students to stand anywhere between the two opinion signs, indicating the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. (For example, a student who cannot come to a definite decision may stand in the middle between “agree” and “disagree.”)
6. Invite four or more students standing in different places to explain the reasons for their position.
7. Once these students have shared, ask all the students to return to their seats. Lead the class in a discussion of the document in light of the statement or question.

