

# The Fishbowl Method

The fishbowl method is a creative teaching technique used to generate discussion and a sharing of ideas. An important ingredient in utilizing this method is to create an interesting prompt to engage student interest in the discussion. This format can be easily adapted to fit any topic.

The fishbowl method provides students with an opportunity to explore a topic and to learn from the ideas suggested by other students. Students utilize critical thinking, articulation, debate, and active listening in this exercise. This method involves asking for a number of volunteers who will discuss a certain topic.

Method:

- Begin by sharing the topic for discussion with the class and asking for volunteers who are willing to discuss the topic. For best results you will want to limit the number of students in the “fishbowl” to no more than five.
- Place chairs in a circle in the middle of the room, one chair for each volunteer, plus one extra (for example, if you have five volunteers, you would place six chairs in the circle). Make sure that all the students in the room can see the circle of chairs.
- A volunteer sits in each of the chairs. The extra chair is for any member of the audience who wishes to participate in the discussion.
- The volunteers begin to discuss the topic in question. It can be beneficial to have prompts or questions on the assigned topic ready to jumpstart the conversation when the discussion stales.
- Invite members of the audience to join the discussion, one at a time, by sitting in the empty chair. Whenever an audience member joins the discussion, one of the original volunteer members must leave the group. You may also choose to invite students to join the group. Whether you let students join on their own or you invite students to join, you will want to limit how often a student joins the discussion.
- Audience members, when not participating in the discussion, serve as observers to the conversation, noting what is being discussed.
- Continue the discussion until all agree that a decision / agreement has been reached or you feel the topic has been adequately discussed.

Allowing audience members to join the fishbowl encourages whole-class participation and attention to the discussion. Student and teacher wrap-up time at the conclusion of the exercise helps to cement the learning process and allows everyone to submit final thoughts on the topic.

