

# CIVIL DIALOGUE TOOLKIT

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER



Independence Mall • 525 Arch Street • Philadelphia, PA 19106

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

The National Constitution Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that inspires active citizenship as the only place where people across America and around the world can come together to learn about, debate, and celebrate the greatest vision of human freedom in history, the U.S. Constitution. The National Constitution Center's framework for learning integrates three main components: Historical Foundations through Storytelling; Constitutional Thinking Skills; and Civil Dialogue and Reflection. Numerous resources are available at [constitutioncenter.org/learn](https://constitutioncenter.org/learn) to build Historical Foundations and Constitutional Thinking Skills. This lesson planning packet provides resources, tools, and techniques for fostering healthy civil dialogue in a range of classroom settings. It serves as a toolkit for participation in the online Exchanges.



## CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION

### WHAT IS A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION?

- ★ A Constitutional Conversation is an instructional approach to constitutional literacy using scholarly writings and civil dialogue techniques to better understand the United States Constitution.
- ★ Elements of a Constitutional Conversation include:
  - ★ Separating political views (what *should* be done—a question of policy) from constitutional views (what *can* be done—a question about the Constitution).
    - ★ Policy question: Should a public school principal search a students' locker?
    - ★ Constitutional question: Does the Fourth Amendment restrict the power of a government employee from searching a student's locker?
  - ★ Focusing on ideas, opinions, and understandings expressed in the *Interactive Constitution*.
  - ★ Building our abilities to utilize evidence, especially the Constitution's text and scholarly essays, to support our own constitutional understandings.
  - ★ Allowing us to respectfully share our own constitutional views and listen to the views of others.
  - ★ A structured dialogue- such as the Harkness method, a Socratic seminar, or Fishbowl style discussion-and spider web mapping techniques.

**THE RESOURCES INCLUDED HERE ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS (BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION) TO GUIDE EDUCATORS IN PLANNING THEIR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION.**



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## BEFORE THE DISCUSSION

Below is an introduction to strategies for having Constitutional Conversations in the classroom and developing techniques and dispositions necessary to have discussions that make a difference.

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### WHY DO IT?

- ★ By developing the skills necessary to participate in a Constitutional Conversation, students will be able to explore higher order constitutional questions, interpret constitutional arguments using scholarly evidence, respectfully share their understandings with their classmates, and meaningfully reflect on personal constitutional understandings.
  - ★ Research shows that participating in reflective conversations like this allows students to develop a stronger sense of one's own perceptions and understandings in connection with others by integrating both hemispheres of the brain- the logical left and the emotional right.
  - ★ It is also consistent with the Framers' conception of the constitutional system. They hoped for a system driven by civic republican virtue- one that was guided by deliberation and enlightened public opinion.
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### HOW IS EVERYONE PARTICIPATING?

- ★ **STUDENTS:**
    - ★ Help establish the norms of a successful Constitutional Conversation.
    - ★ Participate in the discussion, working as a team to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to share.
    - ★ Reflect on their own performance, noting helpful contributions and areas for improvement.
    - ★ Reflect on their developed understandings of constitutional texts.
  - ★ **TEACHERS:**
    - ★ Help establish the norms of a successful Constitutional Conversation.
    - ★ Model the skills associated with the conversation throughout the class.
    - ★ Observe and record the flow of the discussion and the credit earned by the students.
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### HOW IS IT GRADED?

- ★ Criteria for quantitative assessment of student participation during the Constitutional Conversation:
  - ★ Since it is a team effort, there will be a team grade. The entire class will get the same grade, with *two exceptions*: students who do not participate at all will be marked down; other



students who perform truly exceptional group-benefit feats (for example, “saving” or immensely uplifting a discussion that is going poorly) will be eligible for extra points.

- ★ Each class should create a list of norms for the discussion, with input from the students and the teacher. The list could include things like:
  - ★ Everyone participates, and more or less equally.
  - ★ Everyone is respectful. There is no talking over one another. People take turns talking.
  - ★ There is a sense of balance and order: focus in on one speaker and one idea at a time.
  - ★ There is an attempt to resolve questions and issues before moving on to new ones.
  - ★ The loud do not dominate; the shy are encouraged. Everyone is clearly understood.
  - ★ Students back up what they say with examples, quotations, etc.
  - ★ The text/readings are referred to often.
  
- ★ For qualitative assessment, students should provide reflective responses to the following questions:
  - ★ How have your understandings on the issue changed or been confirmed based on the scholarly essays and constitutional ideas presented today?
  - ★ What are some things that surprised you either during your research or during the conversation today?
  - ★ What understandings developed because of this Constitutional Conversation that would not have developed if the class performed a debate?

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### WHAT MATERIAL CAN WE USE?

- ★ Sources for constitutional questions:
  - ★ The *Interactive Constitution* contains valuable resources that explain not only the articles and amendments in the Constitution, but also varying scholarly opinions on the material. These essays serve as a model for respectful civil discourse and should be referenced throughout the Constitutional Conversation.  
  
Available at [constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution](https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution)
  - ★ *Constitution Daily* blog\*
  - ★ *We The People* podcast\*
  - ★ Town Hall videos\*

\*Available at [constitutioncenter.org/blog](https://constitutioncenter.org/blog)

- ★ Materials to support Constitutional Conversations
  - ★ The Annotation Guide provided (on page 15) in this packet supports students in analyzing the text of the *Interactive Constitution*. This will help students interpret the constitutional arguments in a way that will allow them to use their research in the dialogue.
  - ★ The “non-negotiables” listed in the Civil Dialogue Habits handout (page 9) should be introduced and reinforced prior to the conversation. These will allow all students to participate equally, share their opinions respectfully, and form well-developed understandings of the Constitution.

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### HOW CAN WE CREATE NORMS FOR THE CONVERSATION?

- ★ Teachers should develop this list with their students. A good place to start is to watch the Supreme Court Spotlight Video from the National Constitution Center, featuring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. In this 10 minute video clip, Justice Breyer talks about what it is like to discuss cases with his fellow Justices.
  - ★ While watching the clip, students can complete 3-2-1 notes. They should write down:
    - ★ **3** Interesting facts about the Supreme Court
    - ★ **2** Rules for discussion
    - ★ **1** Word that is repeated by Justice Breyer
- ★ Once the clip is over, have students compare their notes with their classmates. They should make note of any common information. This will prove helpful when creating the class-wide list of norms.
- ★ After students briefly share with each other, begin a class conversation about what should be expected of them during the Constitutional Conversation. This list should be displayed in order to highlight repeated suggestions. In addition to the list already provided, some other norms could be:
  - ★ Don't speak twice until everybody has spoken once.
  - ★ Stay calm.
  - ★ Listen patiently- do not interrupt, do not have your hand up when someone else is speaking.
  - ★ Listen actively- take notes on what other people say and cite each other.
  - ★ Police your voice- be aware of how long you are speaking.

## WHAT DOES THIS DISCUSSION LOOK LIKE?

- ★ Types of discussions that can be used in your classroom
  - ★ HARKNESS DISCUSSION (or Modified)
    - ★ This method is based more on equal conversation than being right or wrong. Students are seated in a circle and discuss the essential question with the purpose of coming to a consensus, instead of facing each other in a debate.
    - ★ More information about the Harkness model can be found at, [exeter.edu/exeter-difference/how-youll-learn](https://exeter.edu/exeter-difference/how-youll-learn).
  - ★ FISHBOWL
    - ★ Students are divided into two groups; one group will form the “fishbowl” in the center, while the other group sits around them. The center group participates in the discussion at hand, while the students in the audience take notes. After a set amount of time, the students switch and the new “fishbowl” discusses the essential question.
    - ★ More information about Fishbowl discussions can be found at, [srri.umass.edu/topics/collaborative-group-techniques/](https://srri.umass.edu/topics/collaborative-group-techniques/).
  - ★ SOCRATIC METHOD
    - ★ The teacher is responsible for asking the questions, but students should discuss the answers with each other. The teacher’s role is to facilitate the conversation, but not participate.
    - ★ More information about Socratic seminars can be found at, [gse.harvard.edu/uk/blog/can-we-talk](https://gse.harvard.edu/uk/blog/can-we-talk).
- ★ For the National Constitution Center’s Exchanges (more information can be found at [constitutioncenter.org/learn/constitutional-exchanges](https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/constitutional-exchanges)), Constitutional Conversations rely on elements of each of the approaches, especially Harkness.



## DURING THE DISCUSSION

The following section includes resources for getting a conversation started; keeping a conversation going; reinforcing the essentials of healthy, civil dialogue; and recording student participation.

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### MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS:

- ★ In addition to the research your students will need to complete to prepare for Constitutional Conversations, they should also understand the expectations for active participation. There are resources included in this packet that will help teachers foster healthy civil dialogue, develop ways to record the discussion, and create an appropriate space for the dialogue to occur.
  - ★ Participation rubric- page 10
  - ★ Spider web for Participation- page 11
  - ★ How to set up the room- page 12

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### MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS:

- ★ Students are being asked to understand the content, share their constitutional understandings respectfully, and reflect on their contributions. This can be a difficult task for a student who has never participated in a Constitutional Conversation, or a class discussion, before. There are several attached resources to help students organize their thoughts in a way that will allow them to contribute in a way that meets all of the norms listed in your class list.
  - ★ “What to say when...” handout - page 13  
For upper elementary and middle school students
  - ★ “What to say when...” handout - page 14  
For high school students

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## AFTER THE DISCUSSION

This material helps wrap up the discussion with a student reflection on their constitutional understandings.

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### SELF-REFLECTION

- ★ The link between cognitive self-reflection and academic achievement is well documented for secondary school students. Critical thinking can involve both self-reflection and reflection upon other material concurrently.
  - ★ Students are asked to record their own contributions during the conversation. They will also be asked to reflect on their overall performance. This should occur as soon as the conversation is over to ensure students remember as much as possible.
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### CLASS REFLECTION

- ★ After students have time to complete their reflections, present the following questions to the class:
    - ★ How have your understandings on the issue changed or been confirmed based on the scholarly essays and constitutional ideas presented today?
    - ★ What are some things that surprised you either during your research or during the conversation today?
    - ★ What understandings developed because of this Constitutional Conversation that would not have developed if the class performed a debate?
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### SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

- ★ There are two additional resources included in the lesson plan that will help extend the conversation from class to other topics in current events and civic education.
  - ★ Extending the Conversation Beyond the Walls of the Classroom – page 16
  - ★ Action Plan – Choice Board – page 18



## CIVIL DIALOGUE HABITS

Prior to moving into lively classroom discussions, it is important to understand every classroom will have various starting points. Regardless, there are still several “non-negotiables” essential to building effective discussions in any classroom. These skills can be incorporated into daily practice in order to effectively build the habits and demonstrate expectations for students.

### NON-NEGOTIABLES:

- ★ Students listen to others.
- ★ Students speak clearly.
- ★ Students speak in complete sentences.
- ★ Students use appropriate body language.

### HOW TO DEVELOP NON-NEGOTIABLES:

NON-NEGOTIABLE:	WAYS TO DEVELOP:
Student should listen to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Create a “hands-down” policy- students should not have their hand raised when another student is speaking.</li> <li>★ Encourage students to make eye contact with the speaker.</li> </ul>
Student should speak clearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Students should not be allowed to whisper their answers. Students on the other side of the room should be able to hear them and repeat what they said.</li> <li>★ Encourage students who speak too low to repeat themselves.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Praise students who are patient and listening more often, instead of bringing attention to the speaker. Although the intent is to encourage the student to speak louder, often times the student will feel more comfortable when others are patient.</li> </ul> </li> <li>★ Correct mispronunciations.</li> </ul>
Student should speak in complete sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Regardless of the question, students need to speak in complete sentences. This is especially necessary for students who are referencing a scholar’s essay, then connecting it to how it answers the essential question.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Sentence starters may prove helpful for students with IEPs or ELL students.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Student uses appropriate body language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Students should turn their body to face the speaker. This will help with making eye contact as well.</li> <li>★ While it is expected that students will take notes during the conversation, they should refrain from distracting movements or side conversations.</li> </ul>

## PARTICIPATION RUBRIC

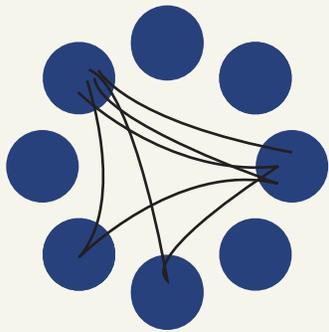
Teachers can use this rubric for individual students, small groups, or the entire class. This provides a way to specifically track the non-negotiables. This can be adapted to fit the norms your class created as well.

	NON-NEGOTIABLES				CLASSROOM NORMS		
	LISTENS TO OTHERS	SPEAKS CLEARLY	SPEAKS IN COMPLETE SENTENCES	USES APPROPRIATE BODY LANGUAGE			
<b>STUDENT ONE</b>							
<b>STUDENT TWO</b>							
<b>STUDENT THREE</b>							
<b>STUDENT FOUR</b>							

## SPIDER WEB MAPPING FOR PARTICIPATION

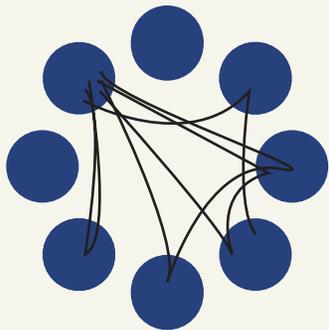
Spider webs are a way for teachers to map discussions. It provides a visual representation of who spoke, how many times they spoke, and which students exchanged ideas the most. This method also allows for teachers to make their own notes reflecting the level of the response and how beneficial they were to the overall discussion.

During classroom discussions, teachers observe and record participation. You can record students' names as they are arranged in the classroom and draw lines connecting students who interact with each other. This includes answering a question, adding to a response, or clarifying an answer. Teachers can also develop their own shorthand for recording students who ask questions and ranking student responses. (For more information on the Spider Web Technique, read *The Best Class You Never Taught* by Alexis Wiggins)



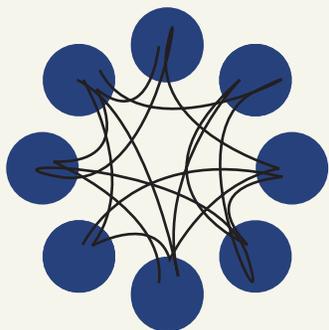
### EXAMPLE ONE

It is clear that there are one or two students dominating the conversation, and other students who only speak because they are required. Developing Constitutional Conversation skills in the classroom will engage more students.



### EXAMPLE TWO

By employing the same spider web method, teachers can start to notice changes that happen in discussions as the year progresses. This web shows a move in the right direction, but still has some students dominating the conversation. Norms can be reinforced, or changed, as your class has more discussions.



### EXAMPLE THREE

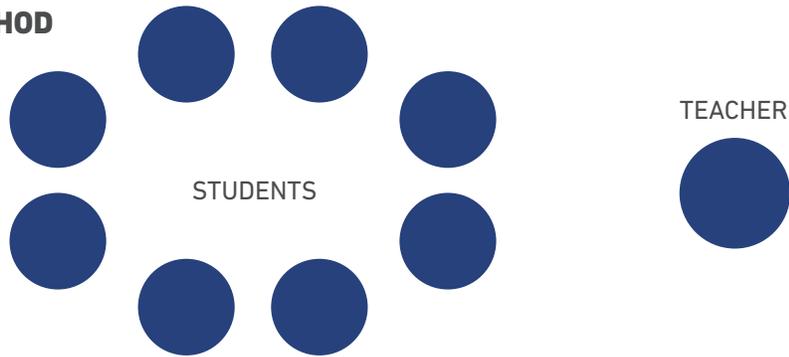
This is the ideal spider web. It actually looks more like a web, and shows a distinct balance in participation. Students are sticking to the norms- no one speaks twice before everyone speaks once, policing your voice, and focusing on one idea at a time.



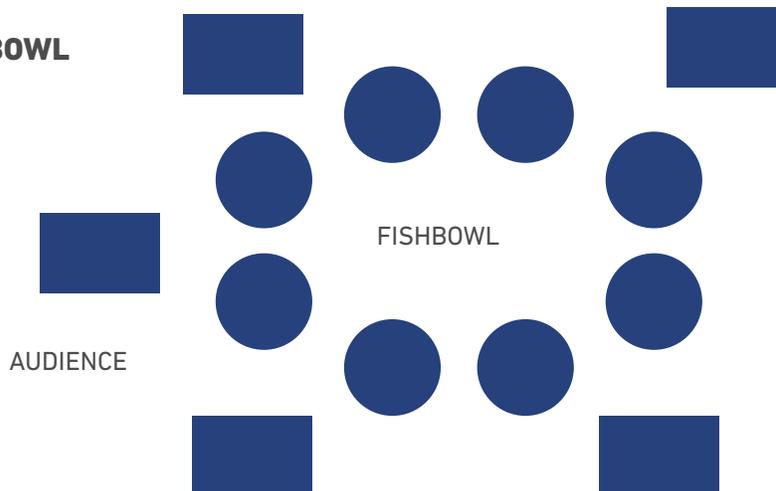
## CLASSROOM SET-UP

The specifics of any classroom set-up will change based on the size of your room and the size of your class. However, the general set up will remain the same based on what type of discussion you are executing.

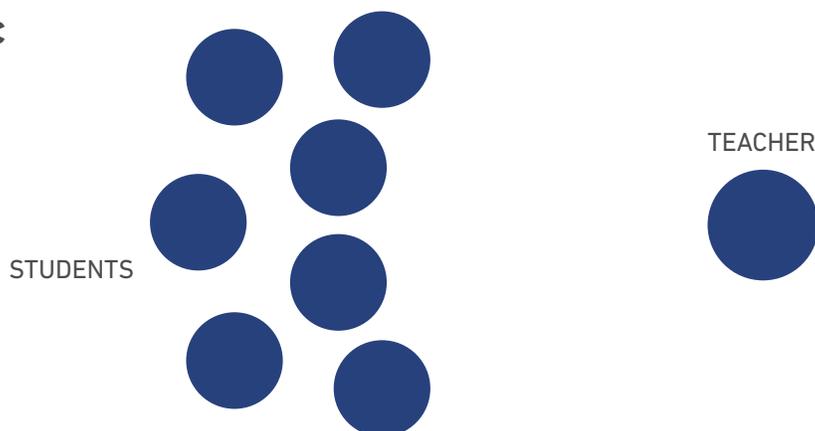
### HARKNESS METHOD



### FISHBOWL



### SOCRATIC



## “WHAT TO SAY WHEN...”

### HIGH SCHOOL

This chart will help you know what to do when there are lulls in the conversation, or if the information is not explained thoroughly enough to convey understanding. These tips will help move the Constitutional Conversation forward, while maintaining the established classroom norms.

IMPORTANT SKILLS	STUDENT ACTIONS
Answers lack evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Add relevant details to your answer.</li> <li>★ Cite the scholar and the evidence.</li> <li>★ Make connections back to the Constitutional question.</li> </ul>
Building on others' answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Build on what classmates say.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Reference the student by name.</li> <li>★ This can be either to agree or disagree with them.</li> </ul> </li> <li>★ Comments are not in isolation.</li> </ul>
Ask for clarification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Ask your classmates to explain, restate, or cite something. This can only help clarify for everyone and move the conversation forward.</li> </ul>
Staying on task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Stay focused on the core question.</li> <li>★ Identify when the sharing strays and redirect the conversation.</li> </ul>
Write first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Use written research and notes to help add to the conversation.</li> </ul>

## “WHAT TO SAY WHEN...”

### UPPER ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

This chart can help during a Constitutional Conversation. If the group gets stuck, use some of these tips to start the conversation moving in the right direction again.

IMPORTANT SKILLS	STUDENT ACTIONS
Answers need more information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Add relevant details to your answer.</li> <li>★ Give examples from what you read.</li> <li>★ Make connections back to the Constitutional question.</li> </ul>
Someone else says something before you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Build on what classmates say.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Reference the student by name.</li> <li>★ This can be either to agree or disagree with them.</li> <li>★ “I was thinking about what _____ said and now ...”</li> <li>★ “Another idea that supports that idea is...”</li> <li>★ “This makes me think of ...”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
You don’t know how to start what you want to say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Use a “sentence starter:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ “I agree with what _____ said because...”</li> <li>★ I like what _____ said because...”</li> <li>★ “I disagree with you because...”</li> <li>★ “We should also think about...”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
You don’t understand something a classmate said.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Ask your classmates to explain, reword, or give examples of something.</li> <li>★ Examples:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ “What’s your evidence for...?”</li> <li>★ “Can you explain more about...?”</li> <li>★ “I’m not sure what _____ meant by ...”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
The answers start to get off topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Stay focused on the core question.</li> <li>★ Identify when the sharing strays and redirect the conversation.</li> </ul>
You can’t remember what you want to say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Take notes before the conversation and look back at them during.</li> </ul>

## ANNOTATION GUIDELINE AND RUBRIC

### DIRECTIONS:

As you read a text, use the following symbols and your own thoughts and ideas to annotate the text. You will earn credit for the quality of your annotation. Create your own symbol for annotation and describe what it means. Create your own example of a thought/idea.

SYMBOL	MEANING
!!!	Very important information or ideas.
↔	Connection – This connects to something else I know. (text to text, text to world, text to self)
???	Question. I don't understand.
	Shocking – I was shocked or surprised when I read this.
	I agree with this idea. I like this idea.
	I disagree. I don't like this idea.
✓	I understand this idea.
	Vocabulary word. Unfamiliar word I need to look-up.

### THOUGHTS AND IDEAS – WORDS TO WRITE IN THE MARGINS

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| “I wonder ...” “I’m thinking...” | ★ Write a one-word summary for the paragraph.           |
| “I’m feeling...” or ...          | ★ Create titles for the paragraphs, sections, or pages. |

### SCORING RUBRIC:

- +20** Well annotated, thoughts and ideas are written on the paper, symbols are clearly used. Words as well as symbols are used. Shows evidence that you read and thought deeply about the text.
- +15** Many meaningful symbols used. There are several words, but not many thoughts or ideas are written. Shows evidence that the text was read and analyzed.
- +10** Symbols are used throughout the text. Shows evidence that the text was read.
- +5** Only a few symbols. Not evident that the text was read.
- 0** No symbols.

## EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE CLASSROOM

### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students will develop a strategy for extending the Constitutional Conversation beyond the walls of the classroom. They will work with a choice board to select a strategy for continuing the conversation. Using the strategy, students will lead their own conversation, collect data or record ideas presented, and then reflect on their experience. They will report back to the class their findings.

### MATERIALS

- ★ Smart board/Projector
- ★ Internet Access
- ★ Handout: Action Plan – Choice Board

### PROCEDURE

#### 1. REFLECTION: Preview/Hook Activity/Do Now:

Think about yesterday’s Constitutional Conversation and the inquiry question: Can the government create a balance between security and liberty? In your notebook, describe what you experienced during the conversation. What ideas did you agree with? Which ideas challenged your thinking? Did you change your mind? Were your ideas supported by what others said? What do you think are the key issues that need to be considered when answering this inquiry question.

#### 2. SHARE:

Turn to your neighbor. Exchange journals/notebooks/written reflections. Read your partner’s written response carefully two times. Once for your head to understand what your partner was thinking. Once for your heart to understand how your partner was feeling. Give your partner one sentence of written feedback on their paper. You can tell them what you like about their reflection. You can tell them how their ideas connect with something you may have experienced. Or you can tell them any new ideas you have as a result of reading their response. Be prepared to share your written feedback with your partner and the class.

#### 3. WHOLE CLASS SHARE:

The teacher can call on individual students to share what they wrote for their response or the feedback they gave to their partner. At this point, all students should have received some feedback from a partner and the teacher can call on individuals to share out with the class and practice their public speaking skills. After three to five students have shared, ask the class, “How can we extend the conversation we started in class yesterday outside of our classroom? How can we share what we learned from one another with other people? How can keep the conversation going?”



**4. TEACHER INTRODUCTION OF TODAY'S FOCUS:**

In today's class we will explore different ways to extend the conversation outside of our classroom. Students will generate their own ideas as the class creates a choice board of action plans. Students will choose a plan and complete the activity. They will report back to the class on their experiences.

**5. SMALL GROUP WORK:**

In small groups of 3 – 4 students, examine the options posted on the choice board. Discuss the advantages and challenges of each option. Then work together to create your own option. Be prepared to explain the advantages and challenges of your plan.

**6. SMALL GROUP SHARE:**

A representative from each small group will describe their plan for how to extend the conversation outside of the classroom.

**7. EXIT TICKET:**

Action Plan – Students will choose a plan from those proposed during class and describe why.



## EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

### ACTION PLAN – CHOICE BOARD

**DIRECTIONS:** Examine the action plan options below. In your small group, discuss the advantages and challenges for each option. As a group, create another action plan in the blank space.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TWEET IT OUT</b></p> <p>Create a tweet that summarizes your position on the topic. Include a link to an article that supports your position. Try to get at least 3 people to respond to your tweet.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LUNCH TABLE TALK</b></p> <p>Invite students who are not in our class to sit with you during lunch. Introduce the topic discussed in class. Ask at least 3 students to share their thoughts and ideas on the topic. Model listening and discussion skills.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DINNER TABLE TALK</b></p> <p>Invite your family members to sit down to dinner together and discuss the topic from today's class. Summarize the arguments presented in class. Ask your family members what they think. Model listening and discussion skills.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CREATE A PODCAST</b></p> <p>Create a 5-minute podcast about the conversation we had in class. Introduce the topic. Summarize different perspectives and arguments. Share your podcast with at least 3 other people. Ask them to comment on your podcast.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WRITE-IN HERE</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WRITE AN EDITORIAL</b></p> <p>Write an editorial in which you introduce the topic discussed in class. Summarize different perspectives and arguments. Take a position and support your argument with evidence. Email the editorial with at least 3 news outlets.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAKE A VIDEO</b></p> <p>Create a short video that summarizes the topic and arguments from the class discussion. The video could be a Vine or Youtube clip. Share the video with at least 3 other people. Ask them to comment on the video.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CREATE A TOWN HALL POSTER</b></p> <p>Using the National Constitution Center's Town Hall Poster as a model, create a poster that introduces the topic and arguments posed in class. Summarize the evidence for different perspectives. Use post-its and ask others to post their ideas.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CREATE A SURVEY</b></p> <p>Introduce the topic discussed in class. Summarize arguments and evidence for different perspectives. Create survey questions that allow participants to share their ideas. Share the survey with at least 10 people. Analyze their responses.</p>

**ASSIGNMENT:** Circle the action plan you will complete. Be prepared to share your experience with the class in a 3 to 5 minute presentation. Describe how you extended the conversation beyond the classroom and how others responded.