

Teaching Resources

Team Talk Strategy for Any Subject Area

Talking Sticks Discussions

Includes Editable Discussion Cards

Laura Candler

Talking Sticks Discussions

by Laura Candler



Talking Sticks is a management strategy that encourages all students to participate equally in a discussion. Each student is given 2 or 3 craft sticks to use during a discussion to signal that he or she would like to speak. When the student is called on, the stick is placed in a cup. A student may only respond until he or she runs out of sticks. At that point, the student must listen while his or her teammates or classmates respond. The strategy can be used in any subject area, and works especially well in reading, science, and social studies. Talking Sticks can be used during whole group instruction with the entire class, during small group instruction, in Literature Circles, or in cooperative learning groups. This teacher's guide includes a dozen pages of ready-to-use task cards with discussion prompts that cover a variety of subjects. These questions will help facilitate your students' conversations by keeping each discussion focused. If you'd like to modify the questions, open the Editable Discussion Cards PowerPoint file included with this product, make the necessary changes, and print your customized task cards.

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How to Introduce Talking Sticks

The best way to introduce the Talking Sticks strategy is with the whole class or in a small guided-reading group, starting with the Team Talk Discussion Cards on page 6. These questions are fun to discuss and allow students to discover how the process works while learning a little about their classmates. Follow the steps outlined on the next page or use the student directions on page 5 to explain the process to your students. If you want to simplify the process even further, you can introduce just one new question or prompt to your class each day. Use this daily question as a focal point for discussing your current reading selection or text-based lesson. After your students learn how the process works, they will want to use it on their own in small groups and will remind you to get out the talking sticks if you forget!

Teacher-Directed Talking Sticks Discussion for Whole Group or Small Guided Discussion Groups

Materials Needed:

- Large cup with 2 or 3 craft sticks for each student
- Set of discussion cards for the selected text

Directions

1. Decide whether you want each student to have two or three Talking Sticks for the discussion. Two craft sticks are enough during a whole-class discussion, while three sticks may be preferable in a small discussion group. Experiment to find out which works best for your class.
2. When you give out the craft sticks, explain that the sticks are called "Talking Sticks" because they will be used during discussions to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to talk. Ask your students to place the sticks in front of them and leave them alone until needed because playing with the sticks is distracting during a discussion.
3. If the discussion cards are not numbered, shuffle them and stack them face down. If they are numbered, put them in numerical order and make sure that card #1 is on top.
4. Pick up the top card and write or display the discussion question. If needed, elaborate by adding more information to be sure your students understand the question.
5. Ask students who want to answer the question to hold up a stick as a way of showing they are ready to respond.
6. Choose someone by accepting that student's stick and placing it into the cup. Explain that the first speaker does not have to answer the question fully; he or she need only speak for a minute or so to get the discussion started, and then you can call on another student to add more details. You may want to establish a specific amount of time that a student may talk after giving up a stick, such as 1 minute. If the student wants to continue talking, he or she may do so after giving another stick to you.
7. If your discussion is based on a book or other written material, remind students to refer to the text and use supporting details when responding to the question.
8. After the first student finishes speaking, other students hold up a stick if they want to add to what has already been said or if they want to disagree with the speaker's statements. (Tip: An important social skill to teach your students is for them to wait patiently and listen while a classmate is speaking. At first, your students may think it's okay to wave their sticks around and make noises to show that they want to respond. Remind them that all they need to do is to quietly hold up a stick to signal that they want to speak.)
9. Select another student to continue the discussion on that question. Discussion continues until no one wants to add anything more.
10. Leave all the sticks you collected for the first question in the cup and draw another card from the deck. Present the question to the class and follow the procedure above.
11. Eventually, students will begin running out of sticks. When this happens, students without sticks may no longer speak and may only listen to others. When all the sticks are back in the cup, redistribute them equally to all students and continue the discussion.

Describe an event that happened in the story. Explain why or how.

What text features are used in this book? How do those features help the reader?

Student-Directed Talking Sticks Discussions

After you introduce Talking Sticks to the class in a whole group lesson, teach your students how to use them in Literature Circles or cooperative learning groups. If they will be using discussion cards they have not used before, go through the entire set with the class to clear up any confusion about the wording of the questions.

Review the directions on the next page with them and designate the first Leader in each group. The role of Leader will rotate to the left after each discussion question. Be sure the discussion questions are ones that students can easily understand and respond to without teacher help. If the prepared questions are not appropriate for your class, use the blank template or a set of index cards to create your own. Monitor the discussions carefully by walking around the class and answering questions as needed. Your students will enjoy this chance to be independent learners!

Talking Sticks Discussion

1. Describe an event that happened in the story. Explain why or how.

2. What text features are used in this book? How do those features help the reader?

Benefits of Using Talking Sticks

Talking Sticks has several important benefits. Because each team member or student has a limited number of sticks, no single student can dominate the discussion. Students sometimes become frustrated when a few classmates or team members take over every discussion. With Talking Sticks, students realize that if they are patient, they will soon have a chance to talk because those who respond first will eventually run out of sticks. Also, after students use the Talking Sticks a few times, they become more thoughtful in their responses. They stop blurting out the first thing that comes to mind because they've experienced how it feels to "waste" a stick and wish they had one later. This activity encourages shy students to speak up because they don't want to get stuck at the end holding several sticks and have to respond at length to one question. Soon your students will begin to request Talking Sticks every time you have a class discussion!

Common Core Aligned Discussion Prompts (K-5)

If your school uses the Common Core, check out these Reading Discussion Combos which include ready-to-use discussion questions aligned with grade level standards. The discussion cards come in two sizes: task cards for small group discussions and large prompts to display for whole group lessons. Click on any image to find the item in my [TpT store](#).

1st Grade CCSS

2nd Grade CCSS

3rd Grade CCSS

4th Grade CCSS

5th Grade CCSS

Talking Sticks Discussion

Materials

- 3 Talking Sticks (craft sticks) per person
- 1 cup or holder for the sticks
- 1 stack of discussion cards



Directions

1. The Leader gives each team member three Talking Sticks. Everyone places their sticks down in front of them until needed.
2. The Leader takes the top discussion card from the stack and reads it aloud.
3. Team members who want to respond hold up a craft stick and wait to be recognized by the Leader. The Leader selects a speaker by holding the cup out to that person.
4. The speaker places a Talking Stick in the cup and begins to answer the question. If the speaker continues to talk longer than a minute, he or she should put in another stick.
5. Speakers don't have to answer all parts of the question. They share what they know and others can add more details.
6. The Leader asks if anyone would like to add to the discussion.
7. When the team finishes with that question, the Leader passes the cup to the person on the left who becomes the Leader.
8. The new Leader selects the next card, reads it aloud, and discussion begins on the new topic.
9. When team members run out of sticks, they must wait for others to use all of their sticks before they may speak again.
10. When everyone runs out of sticks, the Leader gives each person 3 more and the discussion continues.

Team Talk Discussion

What qualities do you look for in a friend?

Where were you born and where have you lived before?

Do you have any pets? If so, tell us about them. If not, what kind of pet would you like to have?

What are your favorite subjects in school? Why do you like them?

What do you like to do in your free time after school or on weekends?

What do you dream of becoming or doing one day in the future?

Do you like to play or watch any sports? If so, please explain.

What kinds of books do you like to read? Briefly tell us about a book you enjoyed reading.

Literature Discussion

Who is the story about? Name the most important characters.

When and where does the story take place? Tell how you know.

What is a problem faced by one of the characters? What does the character say or do to solve his or her problem?

Describe an event that happened in the story. Explain why or how it happened.

What do you think is the lesson the author wants you to learn? Explain using details from the story.

What can you learn about the characters in the story by looking at the pictures?

How do the pictures help you understand the setting or what happened in the story?

Have you read another version of this story? How are the two versions of the story alike and different?

Informational Book Discussion

Who or what is this book mostly about? When and where did the important events take place?

Were there any words that you didn't know? What do they mean? How did you figure out their meanings?

What text features are used in this book? How do those features help the reader?

What did you learn from reading the book? Did you discover anything surprising or interesting?

Name two or more important ideas or events in the book. How are these ideas or events connected to each other?

What is one point the author is trying to make? What reasons are given to support this point?

Do you think that any of the information in the book might not be correct? How could you find out?

What types of images did you find in this text? What can you learn from each of those images?

Movie vs. Book Discussion

1. What is the title of the book? What is the title of the movie version of that book? If they are not the same, which do you prefer? Why?	2. When and where does the story take place? Are there any differences in the setting between the movie and the book?
3. How do the characters in the book compare to the same characters in the movie version? What is different about them?	4. What are the major differences between the book and the movie?
5. What was left out of the movie version that you think should have been included?	6. Do you think the author of the book approves of the movie version? Why or why not?
7. If someone has not read the book or seen the movie, which would you recommend that they do first? Why?	8. Which did you prefer, the book or the movie? Why?

Poetry Discussion

1. What is the title of the poem and who is the poet?	2. What does the poem seem to be about? Does everyone in the group agree? If not, why not?
3. How would you describe the mood of the poem? How does the poet convey that mood?	4. Did the poet use any similes or metaphors? If so, name one and describe the comparison being made.
5. Does the poem rhyme? If so, share at least one example of words in the poem that rhyme.	6. What was your favorite stanza or part of the poem? Why did you like it?
7. Have you read any other poems by this poet? If so, how does this poem compare to the others?	8. Do you like the poem? Why or why not?

Biography Discussion

1. Who is the subject of the biography? Who wrote the biography? Is it a biography or an autobiography?	2. Is the person described in the biography still living? If not, in what time period did he or she live?
3. Describe the subject's childhood experiences. How might these experiences have impacted his or her life?	4. What are the major accomplishments of the subject of the biography?
5. Where were any special people in this person's life who impacted him or her in some way? Explain.	6. What were the biggest challenges faced by the subject of the biography? How did he or she overcome them?
7. How do the details in this biography compare to other information you have read about the subject? Did you learn anything new?	8. What character traits describe this person? Provide supporting details from the biography for each character trait.

News Article Discussion

1. Briefly summarize the important events that were the focus of this article.	2. When and where did these events happen? Is this local, state, or national news?
3. Who played an important role in these events? Describe the role that each person played.	4. Was the article confusing? If so, discuss the article with the group until everyone understands what happened.
5. What do you think caused these events to take place?	6. What do you think will happen in the future as a result of these events?
7. Do you expect the events in this article to impact your own life in any way? Why or why not?	8. What is your opinion about the events described in this article?

Magazine Article Discussion

1. What is the title of the magazine and the title of the article? What is the article about?	2. Is this a news article or an informational feature article? How do you know?
3. Why did you choose to read this article? Did you like it? Why or why not?	4. What did you learn from reading this article?
5. Was any of the information in the article surprising? If so, why was it surprising?	6. Do you think any of the information might not be correct? How could you check the facts for accuracy?
7. What questions come to mind about this topic that were not answered in the article?	8. Do you think the information in this article might impact your life in some way? How?

Historical Event Discussion

1. What is the historical event being discussed? Briefly summarize the major details of this event.	2. When and where did this event take place?
3. What are some important causes of this event? How was each cause important?	4. Who were the key people involved in this event? What important roles did they play?
5. What impact did this event have on history?	6. How did the people of that time view this event? Was it controversial at the time? How do people view it today?
7. How might this event have turned out differently? Explain your thoughts.	8. What is your personal opinion about this historical event? Explain.

Math Problem Discussion

1. What mathematical operations were used to solve the problem?	2. Explain the steps you used to solve the problem. If you drew the solution, show and explain your illustration.
3. Did everyone in the group solve it the same way? If not, what was different in each method?	4. How can you represent the steps of the solution with a number sentence?
5. What problem solving strategy did you use? (Guess and check, make a chart, work backwards, etc.)	6. Did you make any mistakes when solving the problem? How did you discover your errors?
7. Is this problem similar to another problem you have solved before? Explain.	8. How did you check your answer for accuracy?

Science Experiment Discussion

1. What question were you trying to answer by conducting this experiment?	2. What was your hypothesis? (What did you predict would happen?)
3. Summarize the steps of your procedure. In other words, how did you carry out the experiment?	4. Describe the variables in your experiment. What were the dependent and independent variables?
5. What data did you collect during the experiment? Did you create a chart or graph of your data? If so, share it with the group now.	6. Explain your results. Were you surprised by these results? Why or why not?
7. What did you conclude from the results of your experiment?	8. How would you improve the experiment if you were to do it again? How could you make the results more reliable?

Environmental Issue Discussion

1. Briefly describe the environmental issue. What is the problem under discussion?	2. How would you classify this issue? Does it deal with air pollution, water pollution, overpopulation, loss of natural resources, or something else?
3. What are the causes of this environmental problem? Does everyone agree that these events caused the problem?	4. How has this problem affected our planet or its inhabitants?
5. What steps are being taken by individuals, companies, or the government to solve the problem? Explain.	6. What do scientists predict will happen if we don't take steps to solve the problem?
7. How concerned are you about this problem and what might happen if it's not solved. Explain.	8. What can you do personally to help solve the problem? How difficult would it be to take these steps?

Discussion Questions

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