

Chalk Talk

Overview:

Students silently write their responses to questions or text excerpts posted around the room, including posing questions or responding to other students.

Purpose:

The Chalk Talk discussion protocol provides students with an opportunity to silently reflect, respond, and contribute to a meaningful “discussion” with their peers. Student responses can take the form of words or visuals, and students are encouraged to build upon one another’s thinking as they move from poster to poster. The Chalk Talk can be an especially useful protocol to empower students who need more time to process, who are naturally introverted, or who may feel anxious speaking their thoughts aloud in front of their peers to contribute their thinking to the group.

Application: When and where can I use it?

Chalk Talk can be used in any setting and in almost every grade level. It is a useful protocol for giving students the chance to respond to particular passages in a text, to review material for an upcoming assessment, to gather pre-assessment/formative feedback at the start of a unit of instruction, to help students explore essential questions, or any other time you want to engage students in a “dialogue” that makes their thinking visible.

Because the Chalk Talk is done silently, it provides a nice change of pace from a more typical classroom discussion. It allows all students to contribute, all voices to be ‘heard’, and can allow for the exchange of challenging thoughts and ideas in a safe and non-confrontational manner.

Getting Started: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

To get started with the Chalk Talk protocol, you need to identify your “stimuli” – or the questions, prompts, etc. that you will use to generate discussion, along with several sheets of chart paper, and a marker for each student. On the center of each piece of chart paper, write one question or place one stimuli (text passage, image, cartoon, etc.) that students will respond to. The protocol works best when you have enough stimuli/questions to place on five or six different pieces of chart paper. This will allow you to keep the group size around each chart paper manageable.

Each student is then provided with a marker that they will carry with them from chart paper to chart paper. (Alternatively, you can place an appropriate number of markers at each location and ask students to use them at that location and then leave them behind for the next group. If you are using colored markers, this can help to protect the anonymity of each student if that is important.)

Break students into small groups with no more groups than the number of chart papers. Assign each group a chart paper to start with. From this point on, the activity is silent.

Students should read/look at the stimuli on their chart paper and then write their responses/reactions. You may want to cue the students by asking them to think about some open-ended prompts to think about (i.e., What does this image mean to you? How does this quote resonate with you? What does this make you think about? What do you think the character meant when they said this?).

You can choose to cue the students when it is time to move to the next chart paper or, depending on the group of students and their experience with this protocol, you can choose to allow them to each move at their own pace.

As students move from poster to poster, they can continue commenting (silently, in words or pictures) directly on the stimuli or they can react to, question, or build upon the remarks their peers have made.

Once they have visited every poster, students should take a few minutes, still in silence, to review all the posters reading the comments of all their classmates, seeking connections and any surprising information, and looking for patterns.

De-brief the experience by asking students to share what they observed, the connections they saw, what they learned, and any unanswered questions that need to be worked on as a group. You can also ask them to reflect on the experience: what was it like to dialogue in silence? Why might that have been important for this particular learning objective?

See this Instructional Move in action:

[Chalk Talk - Cultures of Thinking \(rcsthinkfromthemiddle.com\)](http://rcsthinkfromthemiddle.com)

Read more about this Instructional Move:

[Big Paper: Building a Silent Conversation | Facing History & Ourselves](#)

[ChalkTalk-N-1.pdf \(nsrfharmony.org\)](#)