

Four A's

Overview:

Students discuss assumptions, what they agree with, what they argue with, and what they aspire to, based on a specific text.

Purpose:

The Four A's text discussion protocol encourages students to explore a text deeply in light of their own values and intentions while also listening to, respecting, and responding to the perspectives of other group members. This protocol requires participants to use critical thinking skills to tease out the author's assumptions followed by the sharing of their own opinions and aspirations related to the text material.

Application: When and where can I use it?

This protocol can be used in any setting, provided students are able to read the text presented to them. The text being supported by the use of this protocol should be sufficiently complex to allow students to identify four A's within the text. This is a very structured protocol that is designed to for participants to explore their own thinking and connections to a text while also learning from others. As such, it may initially feel uncomfortable or awkward; students should be held accountable for following the protocol steps as designed. If the groups begin actively discussing when they should be silently listening, or discussing content randomly, remind everyone of the protocol structure and the value of working within the protocol rather than having an everyday conversation.

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

The students read the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on sticky notes in answer to the following 4 questions (you can also add your own "A"s).

- What **Assumptions** does the author of the text hold?
- What do you **Agree** with in this text?
- What do you want to **Argue** with in the text?
- What parts of the text do you want to **Aspire** to (or **Act** upon)?

Divide the students into small groups of between 4 to 6 students. Have group members sit in a circle so they can see one another while they discuss.

One person in the group starts by sharing one **assumption** of the author, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence. That participant talks briefly about how they arrived at that assumption and why they chose that passage. The other participants should actively listen but not respond. If they would like to comment on what others in the group say, they should make a note to do so during the discussion

round of the protocol. Go around the group until each student has had their turn to discuss an assumption they believe the author holds.

Repeat, starting with a new student for each question, having students share what they “want to argue with”, what they “agree with”, and what they “aspire to”. In each case, students are expected to cite the text, with page numbers, to support their thinking. Move seamlessly from one “A” to the next.

Once each student has shared all four of their “A’s” students discuss their reactions to their classmates’ responses. Students should also be encouraged to think about how considering the four “A’s” – both theirs and those of their classmates, deepened their understanding of the text.

Variations:

- ❖ Instead of “4 A’s”, you could substitute “3 C’s”. This might work particularly well when discussing a short fictional piece.

Where did the characters **Cooperate** with one another?

Where was there a failure to **Communicate**?

What created **Chaos** in the story?

See this Instructional Move in action (link to video clips if available)

Read more about this Instructional Move:

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

[4_a_text.pdf \(buildingpublicunderstanding.org\)](#)

References:

[Four A’s Text Protocol – School Reform Initiative](#)