

Pre-Discussion Prompt

After surveying my students about their struggles with participation, I came to the conclusion that many of them don't partake in discussions because they are not given enough time to process information. Class discussions are dynamic, often quick processes. Without enough time to process information students struggle to form their own opinions and tie those opinions to class content. The fact is that students come to our classrooms with different ways and speeds of processing information. Some students "get" concepts very quickly and immediately raise their hand when a question is asked, while others are left looking on, trying to figure out their own thoughts. In order to neutralize this difference I ask students to ponder a question for 2 minutes and then ask them to write down their thoughts for about 3 minutes (see below). This allows the entire class to form their thoughts at the same time so that each student has an equal chance of participating in discussion. I love this exercise because it is very simple, doesn't take too long, and gives students ample time to reflect about the question being posed (as opposed to saying the first thing that comes to their minds). It also allows anxious students to have notes in front of them when they participate (some students tell me they blank out when they speak in front of a large group). Finally, I can collect the responses and read them over to make sure that every student understands the material. If I notice any deficiencies in their answers, I can e-mail the student directly and address my concerns.

Pre-Discussion Prompt Example

What does Audre Lorde mean when she writes "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"?
