

# CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION

## WHAT IS IT? WHY DO IT? HOW TO DO IT?

This method is modeled after a *Harkness* Discussion with the incorporation of brain-based research by Daniel Siegel.

## WHAT IS A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION?

- ★ Focuses on the *inner experience* of everyone in the conversation.
- ★ Each person can share what they are *feeling, thinking, remembering, hoping, dreaming, believing, or perceiving*.
- ★ Allows us to connect with one another so we can be seen and heard, so we can be authentic and real.

## WHY HAVE A REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION?

Brain research shows that it allows you to develop a stronger sense of who you are in connection with others - integrates both hemispheres of the brain, the logical left with the emotional right.

## HOW TO HOLD A REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION

**ROLE OF THE TEACHER:** Observer who records the flow of the discussion and credit earned by the students.

**ROLE OF THE STUDENT:** Participate in a discussion as a team encouraging everyone to take a turn talking.

- ★ Make “I” statements (I think ... I feel ...)
- ★ Clarify / restate what is said (Active listening: I heard you say ... and I think ...)
- ★ Ask questions and Give responses (Why do think that? Tell me more about that. Why do you feel that way?)
- ★ Refer to the text (I agree with the author when she/he says ... My favorite sentence in the text is ... because ...)

**SINCE THIS IS A TEAM EFFORT, THERE WILL BE A TEAM GRADE.** The whole 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 by “saving” or immensely uplifting a discussion that is going bad - will be eligible for **5 EXTRA POINTS**.

## A DISCUSSION FOR WHICH EVERYONE EARNS 25 POINTS WOULD LOOK LIKE THIS:

- ★ 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.
- ★ There is a clear sense of what the group has covered and how.
- ★ The loud do not dominate; the shy are encouraged. Everyone is clearly understood.
- ★ Students are animated, sincere, helpful.
- ★ When the process is not working, the group adjusts. Those unhappy with the process say so.
- ★ Students back up what they say with examples, quotations, etc.
- ★ The text / reading is referred to often.

Students will earn **10 POINTS** for fully completing this reflective conversation guided worksheet.

### WRITING TASK

Summarize what you need to do during the reflective conversation:

#### STEP 1: (2 MINUTE MEDITATION)

**REFLECT** on your inner thoughts and feelings about the topic. **THINKING AND WRITING**

**TODAY'S ISSUE:** *How should the government balance protecting our security and our liberty?*

#### STEP 2: (3 MINUTE SUSTAINED SILENT READING)

**READ** the article or handout for today's reflective conversation. Use the space below to take notes for the discussion:

#### STEP 3: (25 MINUTE REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION)

Look over the role of the student. Be sure to participate in the conversation. Remember to be respectful and work together. You will earn a group grade (25 points).

#### STEP 4: FINAL REFLECTION

**THINKING AND WRITING** - What are your thoughts and feelings about the conversation we had in class today? Write about the emotions you felt during the conversation, things you said, and/or things you heard others say. (Minimum 5 lines)

