

Instructional Strategy to Promote a Culture for Learning



“Save the Last Word for Me” is a discussion strategy that requires all students to participate as active speakers and listeners. The clearly defined structure helps shy students share their ideas and ensures that frequent speakers practice being quiet. It is often used as a way to help students debrief a reading or film.

Procedure:

Step one: Preparation

Identify a reading or video excerpt that will serve as the catalyst for this activity.

Step two: Students read and respond to text

Have students read or view the selected text. Ask students to highlight three sentences that particularly stood out for them and write each sentence on the front of an index card. On the back they should write a few sentences explaining why they chose that quote - what it meant to them, reminded them of, etc. They may have connected it to something that happened to them in their own lives, to a film or book they saw or read, or to something that happened in history or is happening in current events.



Step three: Sharing in small groups

Divide the students into groups of three, labeling one student A, one B, and the other C. Invite "A"s to read one of their chosen quotations. Then students B and C discuss the quotation. What do they think it means? Why do they think these words might be important? To whom? After several minutes, ask the A students to read the back of their cards (or to explain why they picked the quotation), thus having "the last word." This process continues with the B student sharing and then student C. This is actually an acceptable use of triads, since only two are discussing or sharing at a time.

Variations:

- **Using images:** This same process can be used with images instead of quotations. You could give students a collection of posters, paintings and photographs from the time period you are studying and then ask students to select three images that stand out to them. On the back of an index card, students explain why they selected this image and what they think it represents or why it is important. **For the younger students, this could also be done orally if you wish.**
- **Using questions:** Ask students to think about three "probing" questions the text raises for them. (A "probing" question is interpretive and evaluative. It can be discussed and has no clearly defined "right" answer, as opposed to clarifying questions which are typically factual in nature.) Students answer the question on the back of their card. In small groups, students select one of their questions for the other two students to discuss.