



**FACING  
HISTORY &  
OURSSELVES**

**CLASSROOM VIDEO • VIEWING GUIDE**

# FOSTERING ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH FISHBOWL DISCUSSION

## Overview

In this classroom video, social studies teacher Jenna Forton uses the Fishbowl teaching strategy to structure a class discussion about primary documents related to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. The students seated inside the “fishbowl” actively participate in a discussion by asking questions and sharing their opinions, while students seated outside listen carefully to the ideas presented. Students take turns in these roles so that they practice being both contributors and listeners in a

group discussion. This strategy is especially useful when you want to make sure all students participate in a discussion, when you want to help students reflect on what a good discussion looks like, and when you need a structure for discussing controversial or difficult topics. A Fishbowl discussion is also an excellent pre-writing activity, often unearthing questions or ideas that students can explore more deeply in an independent assignment.

## Questions to Consider

1. What do you notice about how student chairs and desks are arranged in this classroom for the Fishbowl discussion? What effect do you think this arrangement has on the discussion? What do you need to consider in your own classroom to arrange the space for a Fishbowl activity?
  2. At **0:46**, Ms. Forton describes a Fishbowl activity as “a language-acquisition process.” What do you think she means by that?
  3. At **6:21**, Ms. Forton notes: “Building those relationships is so essential in students trusting enough to be vulnerable in conversations that require honesty . . . Some students don’t want to tap into the Fishbowl because they don’t feel that they are good enough, or that their thought is articulate enough. So part of that rapport-building is also necessary for that encouragement.” What evidence do you see of Ms. Forton building this rapport in her classroom? What do you do in your classroom to foster student trust?
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## Featured

### Jenna Forton

Social Studies Teacher  
8th Grade  
Ravenswood  
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## Video Goals

- **See** how a teacher uses the Fishbowl strategy with students.
- **Consider** how you might use the Fishbowl strategy in your own classroom.
- **Determine** the differences between a typical class discussion and a Fishbowl discussion.

## Lesson Resources

- **Choices in Little Rock** (pages 35–36)
- **Teaching Strategy: Fishbowl**