

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING



Instructions

Step-by-Step Directions

The goal of this activity is for students to talk as long as they can about one prompt or question that is related to content from a thematic unit. This activity can be used at the start of a lesson, as a transition from one lesson segment to another, and/or as a closure.

1. Prior to implementing this activity, the teacher introduces and practices conversation starters, expressions to extend a conversation, and language that can be used to bring a conversation to an end. These phrases can be explicitly taught and posted on a large chart for students to use as they interact with one another.
2. The teacher says, writes, or projects a question related to the thematic unit, and students find a conversation partner and begin talking. It is best to give a specific amount of time for students to talk, such as one or two minutes.
3. As students work, the teacher moves around the room to moderate and assess, only interrupting when the students' discussions stall.
4. After the allotted conversation time is over, the teacher asks several student groups to share information they learned from their conversations, or present a new conversation for the full class.

Materials

- Teacher-created questions about the unit of study

Similar Strategies

- Socratic Circle; Harkness Table

Classroom Background Information

Language, Grade, and Proficiency Level

- Arabic 150: Novice High
- Arabic 350: Intermediate Mid

School Background

- *Choate Rosemary Hall* is an independent co-ed private boarding school in Wallingford, Connecticut.
- The Language Department offers seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, Latin, Greek, Italian, and Spanish.
- The Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies Program (AMES) takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Arabic by exploring literature, culture, religion and history in addition to language.

Teacher Background

- *Mr. Georges Chahwan* serves as the Head of the Language Department at Choate Rosemary Hall, overseeing the Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies Program (AMES). Georges' belief in the power of languages to expand students' horizons led him to spend over 14 years as an educator in Lebanon, Switzerland, France and the USA.

Ideas for Scaling Up or Down

1. For novice learners, prepare conversation questions and sentence starters for each unit of study, devising prompts based on students' proficiency targets, which are slightly above students' current proficiency level.
2. For intermediate and advanced learners, adjust the questions to be open-ended, hypothetical and thus requiring students to speak in connected sentences and paragraphs as they interact.

Keep the Conversation Going

Implementation Guide

Keep the information below in mind as you are implementing this strategy in your classroom.

1) SETTING UP THE ACTIVITY:

When setting up Keep the Conversation Going, do the following:

- Explain the Can-Do Statements, making clear what students will be able to do with the language as a result of the learning that takes place during the task.
- Give clear directions, time frame, and model with a student.
- Brainstorm and review communication strategies students can use to 'keep the conversation going,' such as transition words and follow up questions; as well as nonverbal communication strategies such as pausing to allow for time to think, conversation fillers, facial expressions, and body language.
- Ensure students have proper content knowledge before beginning; provide reference materials such as sentence starters and word walls.
- Design an authentic and engaging scenario.

2) SUPPORTING STUDENT WORK:

In order for students to be able to participate fully in the activity, do the following:

- Ensure all students understand their role and the objective of the activity.
- Rotate through class and listen to conversations to confirm students are on topic and to gather information for a formative assessment.

3) WRAPPING UP THE ACTIVITY:

When closing the Keep the Conversation Going, do the following:

- Refer back to the Can-Do Statements as a summation of the activity.
- Acknowledge and encourage students' work.
- Provide time for students to present, either by sharing information they learned from their conversations, or presenting a new conversation for the full class.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Teacher Role

1. How does Mr. Chahwan differentiate the strategy and his expectations to meet the needs of beginner and intermediate students?
2. How does Mr. Chahwan ensure students are prepared to participate in this activity?
3. What support does Mr. Chahwan provide while students are working?

Student Work

1. How does this strategy build students' interpersonal communication skills and promote the authentic exchange of ideas?
2. How does working with a partner push students to expand their content knowledge and language use?

Application

1. What are your next steps for implementing this in your classroom?
2. What are some challenges you may encounter, and how can you avoid them?

