

Sticky Questions Discussion Strategies, Usable Anywhere in Philosophy

Pass it on Discussion – in a whole class discussion, one speaker chooses the next and so on (as often happens in P4C)

Flip, Flop – with a two-sided question, first have them stand on one side or the other to show what they think, then advance towards one or more people who disagree with them, so that you have lots of lively paired or 1 vs 2 conversations. At some point, shout “Flip!” and they all change sides and argue the opposite, then later “Flop!” and they swap back.

You Said, I Think... - in pairs (or 1 vs. 2 where numbers are uneven) after the first person speaks, each person has to begin each of their points with “You said...” (giving a summary of what the other person just said), followed by “I think....” (giving their response). It’s a simple way of making paired discussions responsive.

Special Guest – have an old style cassette recorder or a Dictaphone. One or two children each week record their conversation/what their parents or family think, and bring that back into the school

Coaching Questions – use the questions below to push their thinking deeper in a whole class discussion (hat-tip to the Philosophy Foundation for bringing to my attention just how powerful these questions alone are in pushing for depth).

Can you say why?

Can you say more?

How do you mean?

Can you give me an example?

Why is that important?

How could you disagree with yourself?

Pupil Facilitators – as above, but with two or three circles with one pupil in each group as a facilitator, armed with those questions.

Facilitator Facilitatee – as above, but in pairs with one person acting as facilitator in each pair.

Devil’s Advocate – If most of the class have agreed, and they are confident enough to enjoy the game, playfully take the opposite opinion and goad them to argue back against you.

Wandering Wonder - listen out for new questions to ask based on what they’re saying, and see where you end up!

Question Mutation – in groups, ask them to change one word in the question to create a new question that is just as interesting, and then discuss that.

Say it in Seven Words – in pairs or groups boil down their best answer/reason to a sentence of exactly seven words.