

Guidelines for Teaching a Common Reading

- Select a reading that will encourage students to read.
 - Readings should be both useful and entertaining.
 - Readings should encourage students to read beyond the text.
- Identify the purpose of reading the selected text. This purpose needs to be clearly communicated to the students.
 - To provide different perspectives
 - To augment the academic discussion
 - To make an abstract concept more practical
 - To link two different academic disciplines
- Provide a context for the reading. This helps the students have a framework for processing the reading.
 - Biographical information about the author
 - Historical / social context of the reading
 - Consider having the students read the entire text first and then return to examine it section by section.
- Explain that the purpose of discussion is not to find a single correct answer.
 - Looking for perspectives, interpretations
 - One way to illustrate this is to use a video clip and ask the students how the director interpreted the text.
 - First semester freshmen students will need to be reminded about this.
 - Use small groups (3-4) to encourage student sharing.
- Provide study questions to guide student inquiry, at least initially.
 - Direct attention to a particular passage. Help the students focus their analysis.
 - Use questions to guide connections to other parts of the reading, to experiences in other classes, to experiences in their lives, etc.
- Consider including guest speaker(s) to add to the discussion
 - May be a panel to provide breadth of perspectives
 - Introduce students to other faculty on campus who study the topic
- Wait until later in the semester to teach politically sensitive topics.
 - Students need to be comfortable with each other and with instructor.
 - Students need to understand how to interrogate the subject not advocate a position.

Community Reading: Selecting and Teaching a Common Reading
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Teaching a work of fiction:

- Help students identify plot, character, setting, language or style, and themes.
- A good understanding of the first four provides a framework for discussing the themes.
- Direct students to specific sites in the text that illustrate particular themes. This will make it easier for the students to identify the themes.
- Point out ambiguities or contradictions in the text and ask students to account for or resolve them.
- Identify specific passages that relate to the learning community theme and ask about the author's approach or the characters' approach to it.
- Many works of fiction have teaching guides available on the web.

Teaching a work of non-fiction:

- Non-fiction includes essays, editorials, journal articles, etc.
- Non-fiction works present arguments.
- Ask students to identify the claim that is being made and the reasons that are offered to support it (the "because. . . .")
- Ask what evidence is offered to support the claim(s) and what is the students' response.
- Ask students to identify different kinds of appeal, other than strict rationale, that may be used.
- Discuss if the students are or are not persuaded by the argument.