

TOWN HALL CIRCLE



Age Group: Middle, High School

Learning Goals:

- Encourage critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Practice communication with others
- Respecting and listening to others with different viewpoints

Materials: 4-6 readings on the same topic featuring different perspectives

Estimated Time: 45-60 minutes

Note: This activity should only be completed after youth have known each other for some time.

Activity Details

This teaching strategy mimics the process of a town hall meeting, where community members take the floor to share their perspective on a topic of concern. Using this format, students have the opportunity to share their different perspectives by tapping into and out of the group conversation. Students often come away from this experience with a greater appreciation for how our perspective can limit the facts we have at our disposal and the opinions we hold. By listening to others' ideas, students broaden their understanding of the world in which they live.

- 1. Select Readings:** Select four to six readings on the same topic that represent different perspectives.
- 2. Students Read in Groups:** Divide the class into four to six groups (depending on the number of readings) and assign each group one of the readings. Give students the opportunity to read. Some groups may prefer to read the text aloud after each student has also had the opportunity to read the text silently. Then have students discuss the reading among themselves, answering questions such as: What is this reading about? What are the main ideas and facts presented? Why are these ideas relevant or important? From whose perspective is this text written? How might that influence the ideas expressed in the text? Students appoint one person in their group to summarize their reading to the class.
- 3. Town Hall Discussion Part 1: Summaries:** Arrange chairs in a circle, providing one chair per group. The person assigned to summarize for each group sits in the chair. The other students then form a larger standing circle around the chairs. Make it clear that each student in the class will have an opportunity to be heard. Students can only speak when they have entered the circle and are seated. Then, each representative summarizes the reading assigned to the group. It is important that no analysis or interpretation is allowed at this point—just the facts.
- 4. Town Hall Discussion Part 2: Comments and Questions:** After all readings have been summarized, invite students seated in the circle to comment on what they have heard or to ask one of their peers a question. Students in the outer circle are then allowed to enter the conversation by “tapping” the shoulder of someone in their own group and taking their seat. The only way to enter or leave the discussion is by this process.

- 5. Debrief:** After the discussion, give students the opportunity to reflect on the following questions in their journals and/or through a class discussion:
- What did you learn from this activity?
 - How did your ideas about the topic change during this activity, if at all? Explain what caused your ideas to change or why you think your ideas did not change.
 - What does “perspective” mean? Where does our perspective come from? How does our perspective shape the way we see the world? Draw on particular examples from this activity when answering these questions.

Modifications for Virtual Learning

This activity can be conducted in a similar manner in a virtual learning environment.

- To create the different groups, use breakout rooms in your video conferencing software.
- Assign readings as prescribed.
- Instead of using physical circles created from chairs, allow screen sharing or speaking capabilities through your video conferencing software to students as prescribed in the activity. You can also use features like “raise hand” through this software to accomplish Part Two, in place of “tapping” on a shoulder.