

Lesson 2.2 – The Academic Conversation

“Imagine you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress” (110-11).

Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action

Rationale: The reading assignment prior to this lesson will prepare the students for the next step in creating their focus question for the persuasive essay: adding their voice to an ongoing conversation. This lesson is designed to provide the students with the most authentic experience of entering into an academic conversation. The proceeding assignment will ask students to recount the classroom discussion in a one-page single-spaced paper, which will enable them to shift from *talking* about a subject to *writing* about a subject.

Goal: The students will participate in an ongoing academic conversation.

Objectives: Students will be able to

1. Students will listen to the ongoing conversation for at least 5-10 minutes after they take their seats in the classroom.
2. At least 5 students will actively join into the conversation during classtime.
3. All students will participate in the conversation by writing out a one-page single-spaced recounting of the class discussion.

Assessment:

1. During the first 10 minutes of class, the instructor will monitor and restrict any conversation that is not focused on the subject at-hand.
2. After the first 10 minutes of class, the instructor will randomly select a student to invite into the conversation, using step 4, below. Every 4-5 minutes, the instructor will randomly select a student to enter into the conversation, until at least 5 students are participating in the debate.
3. The one-page recounting will be credited for homework, and will demonstrate that all students were participating by listening attentively to the ongoing discussion during class.

Process/Procedures:

1. Pre-lesson homework: By E-mail, assign students pages 2-7 of Reading Rhetorically. As part of the assignment, inform students that they will be entering a parlor (note epigraph) when they come to the next class session. Prepare them for an entirely discussion-based activity.
2. Instructor will invite a guest to the class session, and the instructor and guest will begin discussing a controversial topic as students are walking in. They will each have something to eat and drink, to promote the idea of the classroom as a parlor.
3. The instructor will intentionally heat-up the debate in order to capture the interest of all of the students, who will be observing the conversation.
4. About 10 minutes into classtime, the instructor will invite students to join into the conversation. Certain students will be asked provoking questions such as, “[Stephanie], has anyone ever violated your privacy?” or “[John], if you were in pain and knew that marijuana would completely relieve your pain, would you use it?”
5. The discussion will continue throughout the remainder of the class session, with the instructor getting up to throw something away, refill a drink, stand at the food table, etc.
6. The instructor will end class by handing out an assignment sheet for homework.

Preparation: Adjust seating in the classroom to create a circle of chairs/desks; have a snack/drink table for students; set up relaxing music (Norah Jones, Jack Johnson, etc.) in background;

Materials: Food and drink, plates, napkins, cups, music player, copies of homework assignments.

Accommodations: If there is no guest in class, the instructor will need to select a student prior to the class session with whom the debate can be started. No other students will be aware of this confidentiality.

Possible discussion/paper topics:



Legalization of marijuana

Abortion: Right to choice or Right to life?

Did women's lib kill male chivalry?

Creation/evolution

Wal-mart bad practices

Facebook/MySpace privacy

Should Network TV be more censored?

Is the English 1000 portfolio system fair?

Who is to blame for bad grades: the student or the teacher?

Has the movie-rating system become less censored over the past 30 years?

Do the big oil companies have control over the production of hybrid and electric vehicles?

Should the legal drinking age be lowered in California?