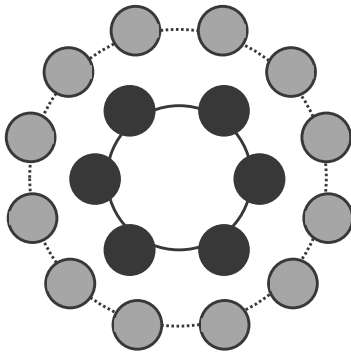


Fishbowl

How?

Organize a small circle of chairs (the “fishbowl”) to be occupied by students who will have a discussion, while the rest of the class either sits or stands in a larger circle around them, listening to the discussion (Figure 1). Be sure to have your discussion question(s) or topic(s) for the group ready in advance.

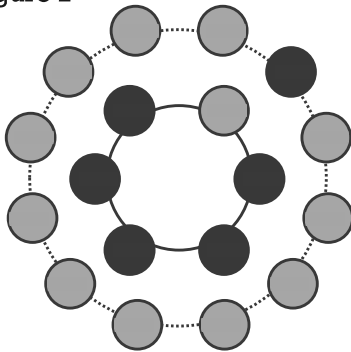
Figure 1



You can ask for volunteers to sit in the fishbowl; more extroverted students will likely agree, and it should lead to a lively discussion. More introverted students probably would not have readily joined the conversation anyway and at least have a more intense discussion to listen to. (You can also choose students if you prefer.)

If you want the outer circle members to be able to join in, then you can introduce a policy where they can “tap out” a student in the fishbowl with a tap on the shoulder and switch places (Figure 2). This allows students to join the conversation if they want to, and also to remove people who are dominating the discussion.

Figure 2



You can add further rules to suit your purposes, for instance:

- No one can be tapped out until they have spoken once.**
- No one can rejoin the fishbowl until everyone else has spoken.**
- Each speaker needs to say something positive about any comment before they refute it.**

In a further variant, you split your students into three equal groups and assign three different readings before class. To start the class, Group 1 is in the fishbowl for 10 minutes to discuss its reading and what they understood from it, then the outer group is allowed to comment for a couple of minutes. Group 2 now sits in the fishbowl and the process continues.

Fishbowls can be sustained for a long time (say, 20 minutes), particularly if the question you pose is complex or contentious. It’s also helpful to have a series of increasingly tricky questions so that you can move the discussion along if the conversation runs dry or if the students appear to have resolved a previous question.

When?

- At any point in the class, depending on the purpose you are trying to achieve.
- If you are seeking debate, then use a line-up activity first so you can pick students with differing views.

Why?

- A fishbowl allows for an intense, focused discussion on any topic you choose.

Sources: Gibbs, G. (1995). *Discussion with more students*. Oxford Centre for Staff Development.

Vaughn, M. (n.d.). *Fishbowl*. Handout for faculty at Elon University, Elon, NC.