
Small Group Discussions: Placemat

MATHEMATICS

In this easy-to-use strategy, students are divided into small groups, gathered around a piece of chart paper. First, students individually think about a question and write down their ideas on their own section of the chart paper. Then students share ideas to discover common elements, which can be written in the centre of the chart paper.

Purpose

- Give all students an opportunity to share ideas and learn from each other in a cooperative small-group discussion.

Payoff

Students will:

- have an opportunity to reflect and participate.
- have fun interacting with others and extending their learning while accomplishing the task.

Tips and Resources

- The strategy can be used with a wide variety of questions and prompts.
- Use the placemat strategy for a wide range of learning goals, for example:
 - to encourage students to share ideas and come to a consensus about a concept/topic
 - to activate the sharing of prior knowledge among students
 - to help students share problem-solving techniques
 - to facilitate peer review and coaching on a particular type of problem or skill
 - to take group notes during a video or oral presentation.
- Groups of 2 to 4 are ideal for placemat, but it can also work with up to 7 students in a group.
- You may choose several questions or issues for simultaneous consideration in a placemat strategy. To start, each group receives a different question or issue to work on. Once they have completed their discussion, the groups rotate through the various questions or issues until all have been explored.
- Placemat also works well as an icebreaker when students are just getting to know each other.
- See Teacher Resource, *Placemat - Template and Sample*.

Beyond Monet, pp.172-173

TIPS: Section 4 – TIPS for Teachers

<http://www.curriculum.org/occ/tips/index.shtml>

Further Support

- Give careful consideration to the composition of the small groups, and vary the membership according to the students' styles of learning and interaction, subject-matter proficiency, and other characteristics.
- Some students may benefit from being able to "pass" during group sharing.

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What teachers do	What students do
<p>Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide students into small groups of 4 or 5. • Decide on a question (or concept or problem) for the centre of the placemat. • Distribute chart paper to each group. • Ask the students to divide the chart paper into sections equal to the number of students in the group, leaving a circle/oval/rectangle in the centre of the chart for the later recording of the group consensus. 	
<p>During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct each group member to think about, then silently write ideas/information that relate to the question in their personal area of the chart paper. Give students a pre-determined amount of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather their thoughts about the chosen question and write silently in their own area of the paper, respecting the space and silence of all members of the group.
<p>After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a signal for students in each group to discuss their ideas and information and to agree upon a response to be shared with the entire class. • Call on one member from each placemat group to share their group’s response with the whole class. • Assess <i>for</i> understanding by listening to student responses. • Use information gained throughout the activity to inform instructional decisions. • Have students post the charts to further share their group’s thinking with the class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take turns sharing ideas with the group. • Engage in discussion with all group members to reach consensus on a group response. • Use communication skills, such as active listening and requesting clarification. • Record the group response in the center of the placemat. • Actively listen as each group’s placemat is presented. • Post the chart for further sharing with the class.

Notes

Adapted from: TIPS: Section 4 – TIPS for Teachers
<http://www.curriculum.org/occ/tips/index.shtml>



Placemat – Template and Sample

Template:

Write quietly on your own in your section of the border for several minutes.	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 60%; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>Through group sharing, summarize the key ideas and information for the question or concept.</p> </div>	

Sample:

Take a few minutes to think about and then individually write down what you know about **scatter plots** (reviewing/summarizing concepts).

<i>Points on a graph</i> <i>Label axes, write title</i> <i>Line of best fit</i> <i>Extend line</i> <i>Curve of best fit</i>	<i>Ordered pairs on a graph</i> <i>Shows trends</i> <i>Interpolate</i> <i>Extrapolate</i>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 60%; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Scatter Plots</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Graphical model used to determine if a relationship exists between two variables. It is also used to make predictions based on the given data.</i></p> </div>	
<i>Points</i> <i>2 variables</i> <i>Used to show data</i> <i>Can make predictions</i> <i>Compares 2 sets of data</i>	<i>Graph points</i> <i>Put line of best fit through points</i> <i>Make predictions</i> <i>Strong or weak correlation</i> <i>Positive or negative correlation</i>