

3.4 Consensus Board

Consensus Board

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Why?

Students need time to explore their initial responses to a text in order to attend to their feelings and connections as they engage with the world of that text. Although this initial response is necessary, students need to push their thinking beyond their immediate experiences in order to become critical thinkers who consider alternative perspectives. Reflecting on their responses provides students with an opportunity to analyze and take intellectual responsibility for their views. Students co-produce meaning through critique and inquiry by engaging in dialogue around tensions that arise from considering their multiple interpretations of a text. They move from sharing a wide range of connections to intensively considering a particular tension through dialogue. *Consensus Boards* encourage readers to:

- Capture initial responses and experience of a text
- Share their initial responses and interpretations with others
- Identify significant tensions that emerge from the group discussion
- Move to dialogue around a specific tension as a group

Who?

Use with any age level through sketching and/or writing.

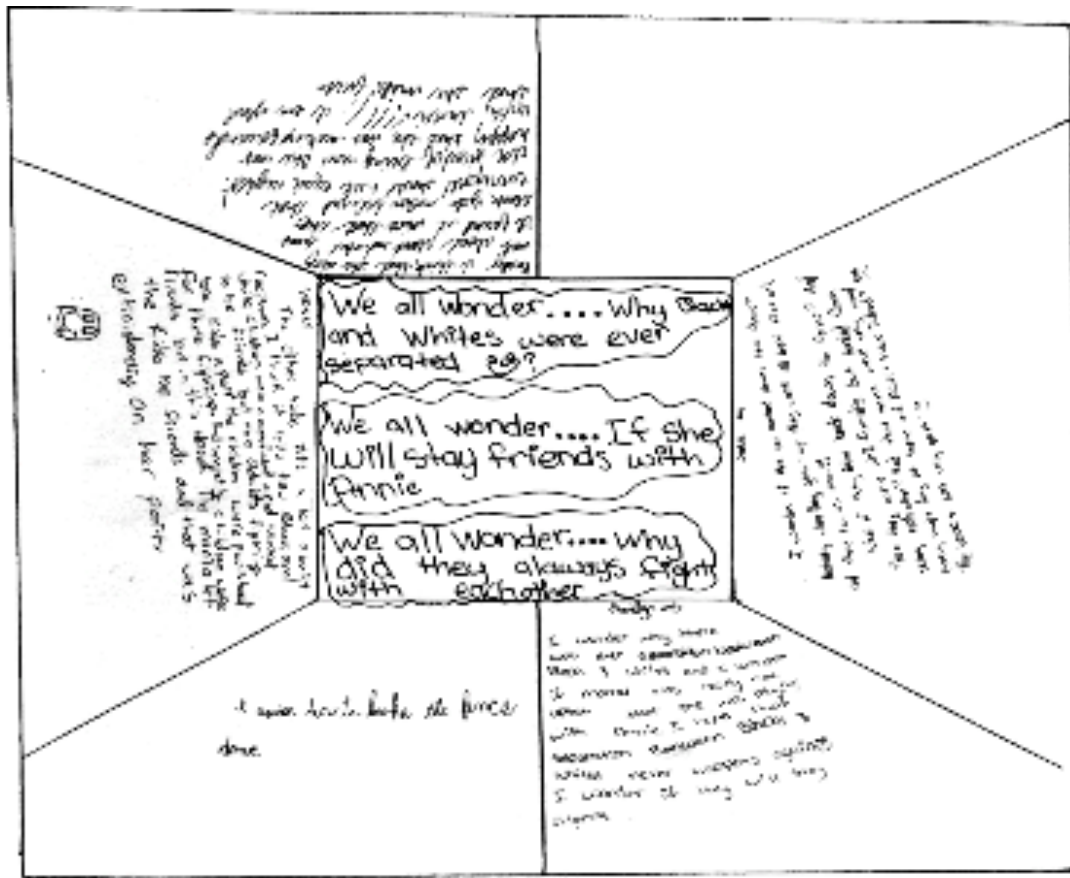
Materials

1. Texts that are challenging and invite inquiry and multiple interpretations
2. Markers

3. A large consensus board created from chart paper that covers the table and has a center circle or square with 4-5 sections marked from that center to each corner of the paper

How?

1. Provide the opportunity for students to read/listen to a piece of literature or experience another type of text (video, art, music, etc.)
2. During or after the experience, have each student take his or her own section of the consensus board and jot, sketch, and/or web responses to that text. Depending on the text and the age level of the students, they may need to first experience the text and then subsequently respond on the *Consensus Board* during a second viewing or reading of the text. Some students prefer to respond during, and others after, their experience of a text.
3. Once students have had a chance to respond personally, ask them to share their responses with each other at their tables and talk and think together about the text.
4. Next, ask them to consider the tensions or issues that are still bothering them and that they might want to explore further. Have them come to consensus on one or two tensions they will spend time thinking about as a group. These tensions are recorded in the center of the board.
5. Once a group has selected a particular tension to explore further, they need to decide on strategies for thinking more about this tension before their next group meeting. They might decide, for example, to revisit the text to locate quotations related to the tension, write or sketch their thinking about the issue, or create a web of their connections and ideas. These tensions become the focus of further group discussion.



Consensus Board for *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), Fifth graders

Idea Sheet

Develop definitions of key concepts at the heart of student work, such as inquiry, journeys, or culture. Students use their individual spaces to brainstorm their connections and understandings of the concept, share these with the group, and then work together to develop a consensus definition for the center of their board.

For More Information

Woodson, J. (2001). *The other side*. New York: Putnam.

This engagement is grounded in the work of Louise Rosenblatt and reader response theories, particularly *Literature as Exploration* (1938, Modern Language Association).