

Philosophical Chairs

Student Rules:

1. Repeat or rephrase what the last person said, before you respond.
2. Wait three seconds before responding, to be sure the last person is finished.
3. You do not have to raise your hand to speak. Join the conversation as appropriate.
4. You may not speak again, until at least two others have spoken.
5. One minute in the hot seat (for undecided participants).
6. You may switch sides at any time during the argument.

Teacher Instructions:

- Arrange chairs in a horse shoe. Leave a chair in the middle. This will serve as the “hot seat.”
- Write the statement that will be debated on the board.
- Encourage students to keep an open mind and listen to their peers’ arguments during the discussion.
- Philosophical Chairs can be done BEFORE or AFTER reading a text. Either way, a quick write prior to the activity encourages more active participation.
- If Philosophical Chairs is done AFTER reading a text, students should be encouraged to cite evidence from the text during the activity.
- The teacher is a facilitator, and as such, should remain neutral.
- Be prepared to be comfortable with silent gaps. Try not to interject. Someone will eventually break the silence.
- Include a closure activity--Have one representative wrap up their side’s argument, after a quick huddle with their side.
- Always follow up with a writing activity, summary, or reflection.

Philosophical Chairs Evaluation/Reflection

1. What did you and your peers do that made Philosophical Chairs effective?
2. What will you do differently during the next Philosophical Chairs to make it more effective?
3. If Philosophical chairs was done BEFORE reading: What predictions can you make about the reading based on what was discussed?
4. If Philosophical Chairs was done AFTER reading: What connections can you make between the ideas presented during Philosophical Chairs and the reading? Think about how the discussion affects your understanding of or raises questions about the reading.
5. Explain how your viewpoint was strengthened, weakened, or changed altogether.