

Comprehension/Knowledge Building, Grade 4-6

Handing-Off

Handing-off is a method of turning over to students the primary responsibility for controlling discussion.

In handing-off:

- Students are seated so they can see each other and engage in a collaborative discussion.
- The teacher takes a seat as part of the group.
- Students have their books and are free to refer back to any selection to make a point.
- Students take responsibility for discussion.
- Students ask questions, comment on what they have read, react to the text, and offer comments that build on those of their peers.
- The student who is talking chooses—hands off the discussion to—another student in the class.

How to get started:

- Model handing-off by offering comments on the text, the style of the writer, or the connection to the unit theme.
- Use discussion starters such as "I didn't know that . . ." or "This piece made me think . . ." or "I disagree with _____ because . . ."
- Participate in the discussion by raising your hand.
- Seed new ideas as you participate in the discussion. For example, "As I read this selection, I was reminded of _____. What did that part remind you of?" Or, "This piece opened up a whole new way of thinking about [the unit]. What do you think?"
- Wait for students to respond to each other; don't feel the need to jump in when there are a few moments of silence.
- Use handing-off periodically, at the end of a section of text, or at the end of the reading each day to check understanding of the text and concepts.
- Build the idea of handing-off into all classroom discussions.