

## Critical Theory Class Discussion Guidelines

### OVERVIEW

- Your main goal is to orchestrate a rich, fruitful discussion about a concept and/or text that you're excited to talk about.
- You'll need to come up with questions or talking points to guide, nurture, and stimulate conversation. Being discussion leader doesn't mean that you need to guide the class toward a particular interpretation or conclusion. Instead, focus on bringing up troubling issues, asking questions, and keeping the conversation going. Your aim is to be a catalyst for the learning of your classmates.
- You have two options for your discussion: you may elect to teach or give an overview of a new concept in relation to one of the units we've covered or will cover (such as a specific moral concept for moral criticism we haven't already talked about). You may also center the discussion on a specific text (an essay, a story, a poem, etc.) but you should still be providing the class with new concepts and ideas; new ways to approach the text with a clear connection to one of the critical lenses from class.
- **The day of your discussion, you need to turn in a typed sheet of your discussion points and questions before you begin.**

### STRATEGIES

- There are several strategies and approaches for leading a class discussion. Some facilitators prefer to throw things wide open from the start with broad, open-ended questions. "So, what did you make of this story? Any particular problems or interesting points?" This is the traditional reader response stance, in which you don't set the agenda but trust your classmates will jump-start the conversation with their issues. Throughout the discussion, you can return to this open-ended strategy.
- Other ways to start is with basic comprehension questions: who, what, where, when? Beginnings with such factual questions or statements gives the class a firm grasp on what you're talking about or what happened in the text. From there, it's easier to jump into questions of inference, the how and why questions that help make connections and draw conclusions.
- You could also throw in a strong opinion to provoke reactions and stimulate discussion. Or, you could use predictive questions, asking the class what they think will happen to a character. However you decide to proceed, you need to have a lot of good questions prepared. Often the best questions are things you're wondering about yourself. If you're choosing to examine a story or specific text, you should know the piece better than anyone else in the room. Read it several times, and make sure the discussion is something that's interesting to you. If you ask a question and are met with silence, wait. Give your classmates time to think, and if that doesn't work, try a different approach.
- Feel free to use different materials, whether you bring in props/visuals or provide handouts. Unless it's absolutely necessary, avoid using PowerPoint in this situation so the interaction is more interpersonal. Feel free to use the board.
- Once the conversation starts, be open to the responses you receive and flexible in your agenda. Keep things focused and moving along. You won't lose points if you don't cover all the questions on your sheet.