

LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Micro Lab: a teaching tool for small group reflection

A micro lab is a way of facilitating communication in a small group setting. It is a 'laboratory' to explore thoughts and feelings and experiment with questions and reflections. In a micro lab, students practice both speaking and listening as a means of achieving an understanding within themselves, and with each other. This is a timed activity. Each student is given the opportunity to respond to a question. They will have two minutes to speak. The teacher will indicate when it is time to move on to the next speaker. When one person is speaking, the others from the group are listening, with the one member being the scribe or note taker. These roles are shared and rotate to each group member.

Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Decide how many groups you will need to divide the class in small groups of 4; for example, 10 groups of 4 for a class of 40 students. Have the students count off by 10 and meet in different parts of the classroom to form their 'micro lab'. Ask the students to sit together in a circle, so each person can easily see and hear everyone else in the group.

Review Classroom Ethics and confidentiality

Once everyone is settled in their small groups, review the Classroom Ethics. Also note that confidentiality is important, especially when everyone gathers together as a large group at the end of the exercise. All participants need to agree that what is shared in the small group will stay private. The emphasis on confidentiality is meant to help encourage students to participate freely, not being bound by traditional classroom constraints, or the opinions of others.

Choose your roles and how they will rotate

For a group of four people this means: one speaker, two listeners and one scribe (for a group of three, you have one less listener).

THE SPEAKER: Speak from your own point of view. Share as much as you feel comfortable sharing. It's okay to pass if you need more time to think or would rather not respond.

THE LISTENER: Be an active listener — this means being alert, listening with all your attention and awareness focused on the speaker, no interruptions.

THE SCRIBE: Write down key thoughts and ideas, especially anything to do with proposed action. Thanks to the scribe, at the end of the exercise, everyone will have notes of their participation, and can reflect further, outside the classroom.

After the first round of questions is complete, the roles change. For 4 questions there needs to be 8 minutes allotted for each role.

Introduce the first micro lab question

In introducing each question, it is helpful to say the question followed by a brief example of how you might answer the question yourself, and then repeat the same question again. This gives participants time to think about what they would like to say. In between micro lab questions, you might want to remind students of the classroom ethics, to minimize interruptions and side conversations.

Sample Questions

1. What do you want to say about nuclear weapons? What's on your mind?
2. How are you feeling about nuclear weapons proliferation?
3. What role can people play in stopping nuclear proliferation?
4. What does a world without nuclear weapons look like?
5. How would you like to be a part of creating a more peaceful world?

Note that the questions move from the expression of feelings and concerns, to questions about empowerment and action. It is very important that the last question be about what students can do, and not leave them with feelings of despair or overwhelm.

Reconvene

After each person has answered the questions and shared the different roles, reconvene the full group. Ask students what they learned in their micro lab. Ask for volunteers to share their own experience, reminding the students of their agreed guideline about confidentiality.

This sharing may lead to a wider classroom discussion. You may want to end the session by having students brainstorm/create a web about questions they have about nuclear issues that could lead to further study and action.