Discussion Leading Guidelines

Overview: The goal of this discussion leading activity is for you to take a more active role in guiding the class’s engagement with, and understanding of, nature writing. Furthermore, since teaching is one of the most effective ways of learning, being a discussion leader will help you deepen your own knowledge of the material. Working with one or two of your classmates, you will be responsible for being the experts on one week’s readings and you will actively lead class discussion on one of the days. You should be the most knowledgeable people in the room on the book of that week; you will have spent the most time reading and thinking about its arguments, ideas, style, tone, etc.

Assignment: On the first day of our discussion of that week’s book, you and your group will be in charge of leading class. For the most part I will be participating as a student for the duration of your discussion leading. In addition to leading a class discussion, you may choose an exercise to jump start class contributions, prepare a hand out (which I can print for you ahead of time), provide a brief presentation on some aspect or aspects of the book (e.g. the author, historical background, facts about the environmental issues, etc), or any other number of activities. Even if you do choose to prepare a brief presentation, the bulk of your discussion leading time should still be in active discussion or exercise leading. Please feel free to be creative. Skits, props, free writes, and small group work are all encouraged. Each member of the leadership group should contribute equally to the conversation. Plan for about 30-45 minutes of active leadership. I encourage you to come to meet with me or email me the week before your discussion leading; I am happy to talk about your ideas for discussion leading.

Please email me a typed Discussion Game Plan at least 48 hours before the day you are presenting, and hand in a hardcopy of the plan on the day you present. The Game Plan should include the following:

1. A brief summary of your goals for class discussion (about a paragraph): How will your discussion leading/activity/presentation of the reading help us to meet our course goals? What particular concepts or features in the book do you find problematic or particularly important?
2. An outline of any exercises (writing activities, games) you have chosen and why (again, about a paragraph), or a description of any material you will be presenting and an explanation of how it will further class discussion.
3. A list of questions that you plan on using to guide your discussion leading, a list of passages or moments in the text that you would like to address during discussion, and an explanation of why those passages will be important for discussion.

General Tips:
• Don’t be afraid to test out your classmates’ ideas, push them to think further, or ask for clarification.
• Restating someone’s comment in your own words then asking for another person’s thoughts is a good way to get more diversity of participation.
• Think of your job as trying to keep the conversation going but also don’t be afraid of a little silence. Often, people just need a few moments to process a question and think, so don’t be too quick to jump to your next question.
• Despite being the one who knows the day’s readings best and being responsible for keeping the conversation going, be careful not to dominate discussion.
• Don’t feel as though you need to be the one to respond to everything that others say; you can ask your classmates what they think about an idea, opinion, or claim that arises.
Grading Criteria:

4  Group demonstrated excellent participation (each member participating equally), offered innovative means of engaging the class, listened with care to class responses, referred to specific sentences or passages in the readings to deepen the class’s understanding, emailed me a discussion leading plan at least 48 hours before class time and turned in a hardcopy of that detailed plan on the day of presentation.

3  Group demonstrated meaningful participation (each member participating equally), posed questions, and listened to class responses.

2  Group demonstrated some preparation, offered superficial questions, and showed little attention to class response.

1  Group demonstrated minimal preparation, did not incorporate questions about the reading, and/or failed to engage class in discussion.

0  Group failed to prepare for leading discussion.