



*A Path Toward Better
Student-Led Discussions*

TEACHER GUIDE



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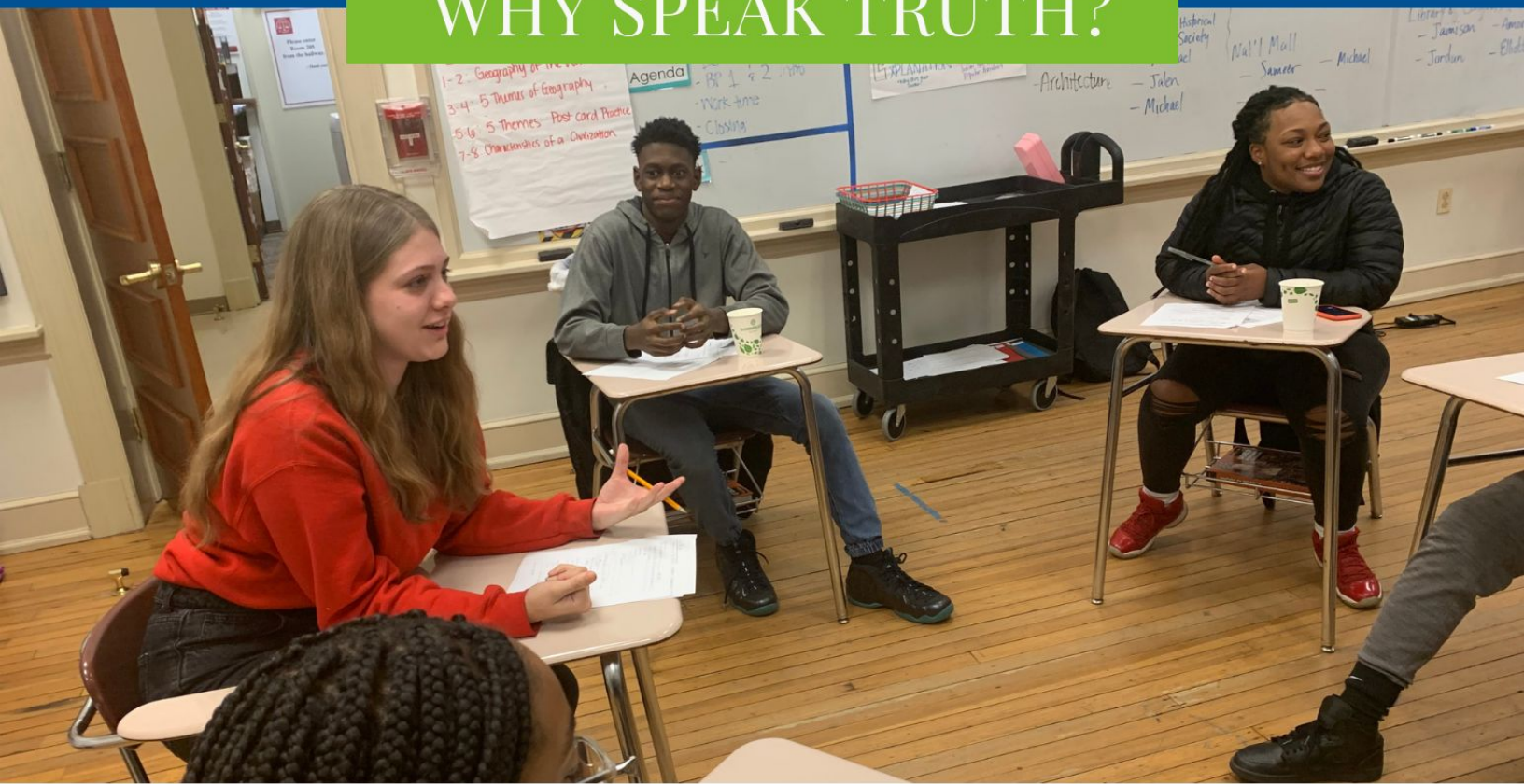
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Young people care about issues affecting them and the world around them. Their concerns don't always line up with the curriculum, and teachers don't always have the time, tools, or resources to explore their students' interests. Yet we know elevating youth voices is critically important not only for students' well-being, but for their development as problem-solvers and future leaders. The Speak Truth model presented in this Guide offers a way to bring meaningful student-led conversations into the classroom. Whether you host a Speak Truth session once a quarter, once a week, or every day, you will be creating a valuable space for learning where young voices and curiosity can grow.

WHY SPEAK TRUTH?



Speak Truth is a youth program of **Center for Inspired Teaching**. The program consists of bi-monthly seminar discussions led by students, on topics of their choosing. Through a carefully structured design, the Speak Truth approach positions students as emerging experts and teaches them how to engage in civic discourse around critical issues in their lives and in the broader community.

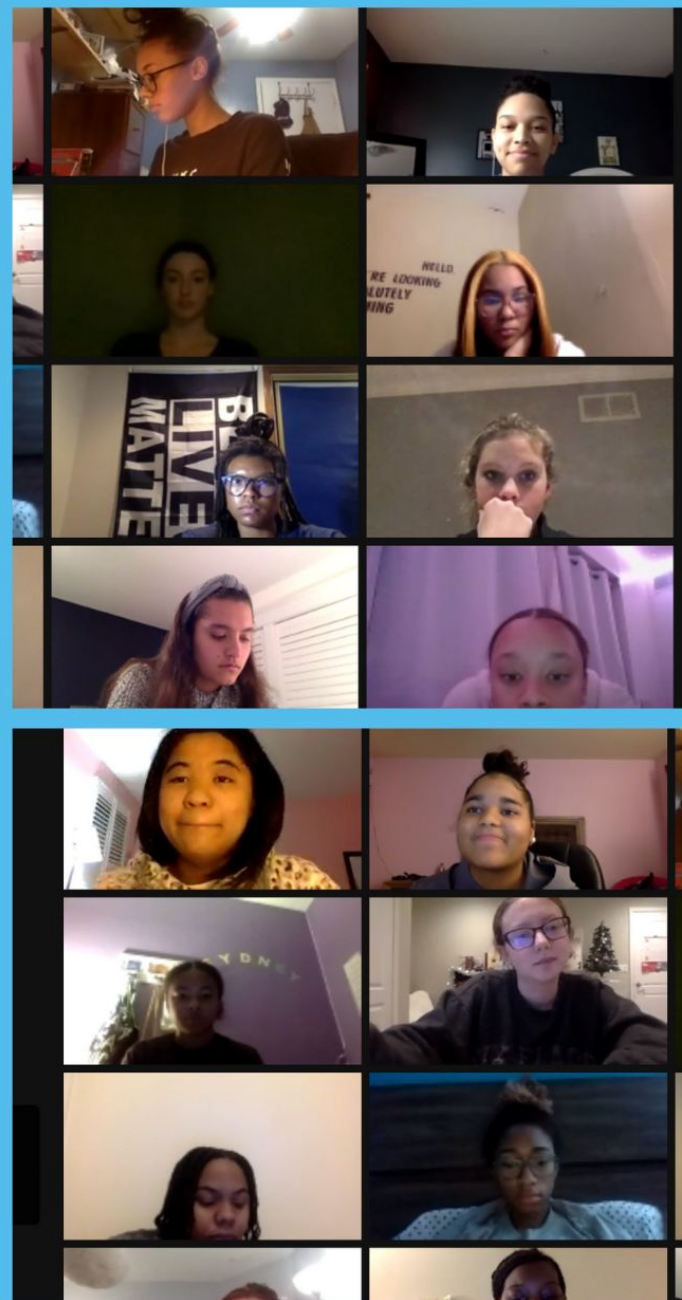
The first Speak Truth session took place in 2014 and brought together public, public charter, and private school students from Washington, DC to discuss Ta Nehisi Coates' "The Case for Reparations." In that discussion, students did all the talking while their teachers looked on. Our Director of Youth Programming, Cosby Hunt, organized that event and observed "a certain power in having these young people talking together with teachers on the outside rather than at the center."

That discussion became the first of many more. Over several years, the format, preparation, focus, and assessment of Speak Truth has been fine-tuned. Students have discussed everything from dress codes to police brutality; the student-facilitators always choose the **topics**, assign the **readings**, and develop the **questions**, with guidance and support from their teacher.

Today, over a thousand students have participated in Speak Truth. The teachers who have shaped this program have learned what it takes to design a student-centered speaking and listening experience that builds the skills of critical media literacy and civic discourse. These are the skills that will enable our future leaders to fight for social and environmental justice, which is why we think Speak Truth should be a part of every student's learning experience.

In spring 2020, the Speak Truth approach was adapted to an online format as the COVID pandemic prevented in-person gatherings. Virtual Speak Truth sessions provided critical connections for students who were isolated during remote learning. While there are benefits to having students gather in person, online seminars make it possible for students from across a wide geographic region to connect with one another.

In the following pages you will learn about how to plan for and implement Speak Truth in your school or community. At Inspired Teaching we understand that no two classrooms or communities are the same and so our resources are intended for adaptation to myriad contexts. A Speak Truth session can be 45 or 90 minutes long. A Speak Truth session can take place within a classroom, across classrooms, among schools, or even nationwide, depending on your goals. **The one nonnegotiable is that students - their ideas, opinions, and voices - are at the center of each session.**



Speak Truth is rooted in the Inspired Teaching approach, which positions the teacher as an *Instigator of Thought*. An Instigator of Thought teaches students how to think, instead of doing the thinking for them. Every Speak Truth seminar positions the **student as an emerging expert** since students facilitate the discussion.

Student-facilitators are prepared for this role with the understanding that an inclusive discussion begins with **mutual respect** for the humanity of everyone participating. Students are engaged fully in an activity that demands they bring **purpose, persistence, and action** to their participation. When teachers use the Speak Truth model in their classrooms, they are engaging in authentic assessment as participants display **wide-ranging evidence of learning**. Even though the topics discussed are often difficult and complicated, Speak Truth sessions are **joyful** because they demonstrate the incredible potential young people bring to the learning process, allowing them to own their “Aha!” moments. When these core elements work together, students build the 4 I’s: **Intellect, Inquiry, Imagination, and Integrity**.



What Students are Saying

“I realized I was wittier than I thought...my intellectual stamina wasn't tested until I had to sprint”

Kya, 11th grade

“Speak Truth helps participants develop as reflective speakers and critical listeners. At Speak Truth, you learn that the people who move a conversation forward aren't always the ones with the quickest or even the best response.

In a Speak Truth discussion, you are a part of an atmosphere where you don't have to worry about saying the smartest thing you just need to be present --it's an active skill.”

Alejandro, 10th grade

“I think it's so important that we don't bubble wrap things for teenagers. We deserve the provocative. We deserve to have those conversations, to express ourselves, to have that real life application of what happens when we disagree.

We're not going to have the candy-coated classroom forever. It's going to get rough and even if [Speak Truth] is just a very small part of that, it's good to have experience with conflicting opinions. It's good to have the other side.

It's good to understand the strength of your own opinion even if it doesn't change.”

Adena, 12th Grade



Teacher Talk: Why is this called “Speak Truth?”

“Speak Truth, is a reminder that it’s not just young people speaking to adults in power (although it's a good reminder that when they speak to each other they are speaking to power) - anytime groups of people are in conversation with each other, every community has power whether they know it or not or use it or not. **The phrase “Speak Truth” reminds students that communities of young people have diversities of opinion, there’s power in their opinions, and their discussions can be a launch point for action.** There is still power in just them talking to each other and educating each other, but these discussions can serve as a launch point to action if they choose.”

Cosby Hunt, Director of Youth Programming

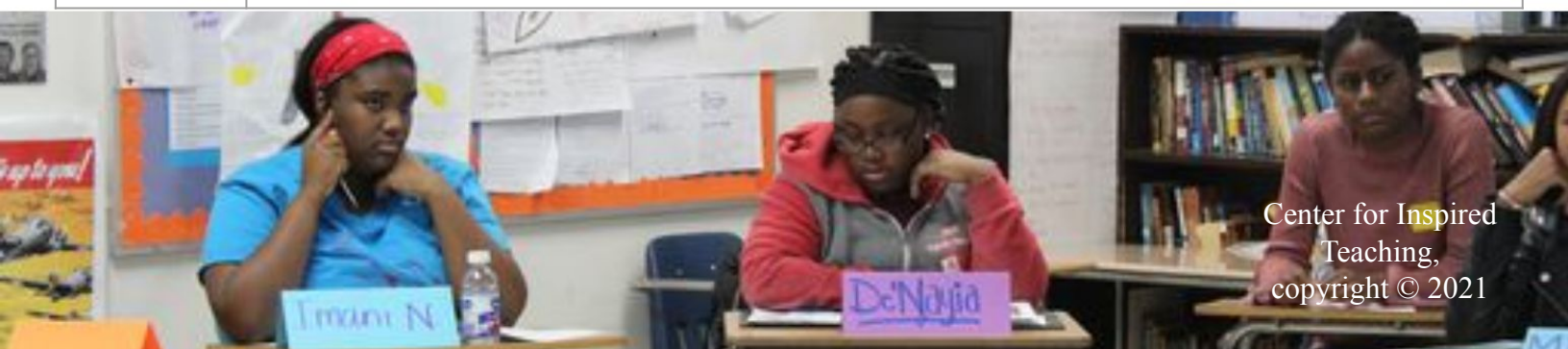


Speak Truth Seminar: Play-By-Play

In every Speak Truth seminar, the student-facilitator leads the following:

Guidebook pages with black banners at the top are printable prep sheets for each element below.

Time	Element
5-10 minutes	Opening The opportunity for all students to share who they are, their names and pronouns, where they go to school, and something of interest about them that will help attendees gain some common ground/understanding.
5-10 minutes	Context Setting The establishments of norms and expectations, and an introduction of the topic with some foregrounding by the student-facilitator(s); compelling readings, videos, or podcasts are given to participants ahead of time to build familiarity with the topic and help set the stage for the discussion.
40-60 minutes	Civic Discussion Thought provoking questions that guide participants from less controversial ideas to those that challenge thinking, easing the group from comfort into discomfort. Activities or questions to further establish personal connections to the topic geographically, politically, socioeconomically, etc. Because these are facilitated by the student-facilitator, a high level of mutual trust is maintained. Efforts made to hear from a wide variety of voices, so no one person dominates the discussion.
10-15 minutes	Closing A closing question that synthesizes the contributions of participants and offers an opportunity for closing thoughts.



Getting Started

What materials do I need to start a Speak Truth seminar?

Speak Truth seminars can be done pretty much anywhere and with very few resources. Speak Truth works well online and in-person. If you are meeting with students in-person who do not know each other already (i.e. they are from different schools or classes), it's a good idea to have paper "name tents" that they can put on their desks to ensure students address each other by name during the discussion. Invite students to include their pronouns on name tents and in introductions. Have student-facilitators prepare copies of infographics or excerpts from readings as needed for the conversation. You will find reproducible planning pages in the "[Preparing Student-Facilitators](#)" section of this guide. If you're hosting a virtual Speak Truth seminar, a basic Zoom or Google Hangouts account works just fine.

When should I host a Speak Truth seminar?

Teachers can challenge students to select topics that connect to the curriculum for some Speak Truth seminars, and open up other Speak Truth seminars to any topics of interest to students. (See [page 35](#) for a list of some of the powerful topics Inspired Teaching's students have chosen for their Speak Truth seminars.) In all cases, it's imperative that students are choosing the topics and leading the discussions. A full class period is needed for a solid discussion. (When possible, Speak Truth seminars can run an hour or more.) Speak Truth seminars can happen during the school day, during a club period, and/or as an afterschool activity. Students who engage in Speak Truth seminars build community, strengthen trust with one another, and are deeply engaged. Inspired Teaching's research bears this out: 91% of students rate the Speak Truth experience as good or excellent; 87% report they have been exposed to new ideas and perspectives; **81% of students report that their time spent at Speak Truth is more enjoyable and meaningful than their time spent at school.**

How much time will it take to plan a Speak Truth seminar?

When the seminar is in action, the teacher is paying close attention and side-coaching the student-facilitator(s) as needed. But the students are running the show. The work you must do behind the scenes to prepare and support students in taking on this leadership role is not insignificant. This Guidebook will help! But it takes time to help students hone their big ideas into focused topics and to coach them in crafting questions that open discussion rather than stifle it. ***This work not only enables students to lead a productive discussion, it also strengthens teacher-student relationships.***

We spend between 2-4 hours in planning and preparation with each of the students who leads a Speak Truth seminar. As explored in the following pages, much of your work will entail preparing student-facilitators to be effective listeners, thoughtful community builders, and objective leaders. ***This takes time, but the work pays off in dividends when students take the lead.*** Ultimately, you can learn to teach these skills to your entire class, nurturing everyone to fill the facilitator role, then have individuals lead seminars throughout the year.



Teacher Pre-Planning Guide

Before you host a Speak Truth seminar, consider the following questions.

What are my greatest concerns about trying something like this with my class?

Where can I make time in my schedule for a Speak Truth session?

What school policies do I have to consider in supporting my students' selection of a topic?

If my principal walks in and sees a Speak Truth session in action, what questions might I have to answer? How can I engage my principal/department head in the planning process so that they can support my students and me?

What skills have my students learned already that they can exercise in a Speak Truth session?

What skills will I need to teach them?

Teacher Pre-Planning Guide (*continued*)

Are there curricular ties that students could make in choosing their own topic? The best Speak Truth sessions are student-driven, but you can still tie their decision-making to the content you are teaching.

Here are examples:

Secondary: Choose a Speak Truth topic that relates in some way to what we've learned about the Vietnam War. (Connections might include: protest, foreign conflicts in which the US is involved, national discontent with government policies, long term effects of trauma on mental health.)

Elementary: Choose a Speak Truth topic that relates in some way to what we've learned about protecting the environment. (Connections might include: waste from school cafeterias, whether straws should be banned, the impact of picking up trash in your neighborhood, what we can do to stop polluting.)

Are there other people in my school who could help me prepare students for a Speak Truth session? If yes, who? If no, where will I find the time to prepare them? Can I do it with the whole class? Is there an opportunity to invite students from other classes / schools to participate?

Menkhu-ta's Story

“While in high school, I got involved in Speak Truth where I facilitated a few discussions. Among them were sessions about Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), Black feminism, the People of Color (POC) experience in predominantly white high schools, and LGBTQ issues. As a Speak Truth facilitator, it was my responsibility to control and direct the conversation among my peers: this was both challenging and affirming. These conversations created a safe space in which my peers and I could hear each other and be heard.

Currently, as a freshman in college and a Speak Truth intern, I support high school students in their prep work and conversations by helping them think through their choices in resources, discussion questions, and the overall flow of conversation, including how to respond to the unexpected.

The value in Speak Truth discussions is that they give students the opportunity to practice the democratic skills of listening and speaking, empathetically. Equally as valuable, Speak Truth carved out space in the week where my peers and I could engage in intellectual conversations around hot topics while releasing the stress surrounding it all.”

**Menkhu-ta, Speak Truth
former facilitator & Intern**



PREPARING STUDENT-FACILITATORS



Speak Truth is designed to nurture the 4 I's in students, particularly Integrity, which requires students to speak with confidence about their lived experience, draw from reputable resources to back up their views, and listen respectfully to peers from a place of empathy and compassion. Speak Truth is a national model for building cultural competency through student-led civic discourse and dialogue. The thought-provoking conversations at Speak Truth teach students to defend their stances on a variety of issues and help them develop and recognize the power of their voices.

Identify Facilitator(s)

(It is best to encourage students to volunteer for this role, rather than assigning it. This facilitates stronger ownership of the process on the part of the students.)

Student-Facilitator Job Description:

- Choose a discussion topic.
- Research the topic and thoughtfully choose readings/videos for participants to read/watch in preparation for the discussion.
- Craft an introductory activity and set of questions to ask during the discussion.
- Open the discussion with a welcome and framing of the topic, then establish norms/expectations for participation, and lead the discussion through questions, active listening, and acknowledgment of participants.
- Close the discussion with a synthesis of learning and invitation for feedback.

Facilitation Prep

From choosing a topic to crafting good questions to understanding their role as listeners and objective guides rather than participants with a particular view, preparation takes time. On the following pages we explain each step of the process and offer a planning guide to help you along the way.

(It may help to refer back to the overview of “[Key Elements of the Speak Truth Approach](#)” for reference.



Prep Session 1: Choosing a Topic & Resources

GENERATING TOPICS

Students will often generate ideas on their own, but even so, consider collecting topics on an ongoing basis that they can choose from by:

- Eavesdropping! Listen to the discussions as students come into the classroom to pick up key issues they are energetically discussing.
- Asking students what social media channels they use to get their “news” and then following those yourself to see what is trending.
- Giving students a warm-up in which they list 3 lunchtime conversation topics.

Once your student-facilitator has chosen a topic, your task is to help them narrow it down so it can be focused enough to provide good conversation but broad enough to incorporate a wide range of depths of knowledge and experience.

Ask them questions like:

- Why is this topic important to you?
- What part of this topic might your peers have the most to say about?
- How does this topic relate to your life today?

CHOOSING RESOURCES

Typically you will need between 2 and 3 resources. They can be articles, videos, infographics, podcasts, etc.

Resources should meet the following criteria:

- They come from reputable outlets and do not promote any false ideas.
- Resources offer a variety of perspectives; articles/videos with opposing perspectives can deepen the discussion and ensure that one ideology is not being promoted over another.
- Consider the length of the set of readings/resources as a whole. In general, participants should be able to read/watch all resources in 30-60 minutes or less.

Sean's Story

“I’ve had to do discussions for school, like Socratic seminars. And none of them have been as engaged as this and I think a lot of that is because if we have to discuss something in school it’s going to be what we’ve been talking about in class. It’s going to be ‘analyze this speech and discuss it with your classmates’ and we don’t get to choose that so no one’s going to care. I think that that’s why this is such a great format. I try to engage in classes but it’s honestly a lot harder if I don’t care and I don’t have a personal relationship with the material. It’s just a lot easier to engage with other students when you choose the topic.”

Sean, 12th Grade



Teacher Talk: Can't we just set the topics for the discussion?

“The teacher in me would like to set the topics ahead of time and that would help me identify who the students would be and know when to train kids up to be facilitators, but the magic of Speak Truth is really being able to go with the flow of what will come on the radar of young people as the year goes on.”

Cosby Hunt, Director of Youth Programming

Peniel's Story

"As a student-facilitator, when choosing source material, consider both digital and print--whichever is easiest to share and most engaging to you. Remember print/articles aren't the only possible source--podcast, radio, YouTube and social media are all viable sources on which to build a discussion.

The most challenging part for me was selecting which source best fit the direction I wanted to take the discussion and the simplicity of the source's explanations around the topic in question. I overcame this by trying to understand the topic before the discussion and filling the information gaps as best as I could during the conversation.

In order to do this, you should be familiar with your sources before the discussion as to explain the information to students who didn't have the opportunity to read it or didn't fully grasp its content. Remember, the sources are supposed to be a guide not a mandatory element to the discussion."

Peniel, 12th Grade



Choosing a Topic

Student Facilitators can use this sheet to plan the focus of their Speak Truth session.

Topic I would like to explore:

This topic is important because:

About what part of this topic might my peers have the most to say?

How does this topic relate to life today?

Student Facilitator Insider Tip:

Choose a topic on which you have a strong opinion, or one that connects to a personal experience. Choose a topic on which you are interested in hearing other people's opinions.

Choosing Resources

Student Facilitators can use this sheet to plan the resources for their Speak Truth session.

Consider resources in various media formats including:

- Short videos (1-3 minutes long)
- Podcast Clips (1-3 minutes long)
- Newspaper/Magazine Articles
- Infographics
- TV News Clips (1-3 minutes long)
- Photographs

Choose resources that:

- Help to explain the topic
- Are unbiased or offer multiple points of view on the topic
- Come from reputable media outlets that you can trust
- Are succinct and not too complicated to understand

Resource 1 Title:

Resource 1 Source:

What will participants learn from this resource?

Does this source have a clear bias? How do you know? (If yes, be sure to find another resource with an opposing viewpoint - keeping in mind that opposing viewpoints are great, as long as they come from reliable sources.)

Resource 2 Title:

Resource 2 Source:

What will participants learn from this resource?

Does this source have a clear bias? How do you know? (If yes, be sure to find another resource with an opposing viewpoint.)

Student Facilitator Insider Tip:

Choose a resource that you (not just your teacher) actually enjoy reading (viewing/listening to). If you enjoy it, chances are your peers will too, making for a more informed and lively discussion.

Prep Session 2: Introduction & Questions

SETTING UP THE INTRODUCTION

Guide students in the creation of an introductory activity.

This activity should take about 5 minutes and accomplish the following:

- Hear the names of all participants.
- Share the following **Expectations**:
 - **Step Up & Step Back**--Share your voice and then let at least 2-3 people speak before you speak again.
 - **Disagree responsibly**--Disagree to offer a different perspective, not to tear someone else down.
 - **Listen empathetically**--Challenge yourself to see things from the speaker's perspective.
- Learn something about each participant that will help them to know each other better.
- Offer an opportunity for every participant to contribute something before the discussion begins. This helps to ease them into full participation in the discussion itself.

CRAFTING QUESTIONS

For a 45 minute session, you'll want 5 solid questions and then between 3-4 additional ones that can be used if time provides. (Create more questions for a longer session.) Questions should be:

- Open ended (Avoid yes/no questions unless they're being used to set the stage for deeper dives, i.e. "Let's get a feel for where we stand on this issue. Should reparations be given for the past atrocities of slavery? Thumbs up for yes, thumbs down for no.")
- Non-biased ("How do you feel about X?" instead of "Don't you think X is awful?")
- Sequential (one question leads into and builds upon the other)
- Succinct

Student Faciliator Tips

"Sometimes a random warm-up activity works just to get everyone talking and feeling less apprehensive about sharing their voice and opinion either verbally or in the chat."

Alejandro, 10th Grade

"Reviewing the Rules of Engagement/Expectations around the Speak Truth format can be a nice transition from warm-up to first discussion question. After reviewing Expectations, share the statistics surrounding your topic and allow the conversation to flow from there."

Kya, 11th Grade



On Giving Directions

These tips will be particularly useful when you open the Speak Truth session and get everyone ready for the warm-up with an overview of how the discussion will go.

Say as little as possible.

- Prepare directions ahead of time; make yourself comfortable with the concepts and words you will use.
- Be direct. (“Who’s next?” is much clearer than, “If anyone wants to speak...”)
- No need to say, “The name of this activity is...”
- Give directions twice, with equal enthusiasm and poise the second time.

Invite full participation.

- Project enthusiasm with face, body, and voice at all times.
- Tell participants what *to* do, rather than what not to do.
- Respond to participants’ questions with clarity and respect. Even if you have heard the same question already, allow yourself to hear it for the first time and respond thoughtfully and clearly.



Coming Up With Great Questions

Start Out Universal

Consider your first discussion question “a lightning round,” an opportunity for folks to get the first word out and for you to feel the personalities out. The next question is a little low stakes, too, and you can grow in complexity from there. By the third question, you should have a sense of how each participant will engage.

Begin Planning Your Questions with a Brainstorm

Here’s a quick way to map out or outline your discussion questions:

- Write down all the questions you can think of for this topic. (10 min.)
- Put 5 minutes on a timer:
 - Identify open vs. closed questions. (1 min.)
 - Take closed questions and try to turn them into open questions. (2 min.)
 - Focusing on only your open questions, order your questions from simple to complex (2 min)*

Nudge Thinking with Questions, Not Debate

In the midst of the discussion, don't be afraid to ask hard questions that challenge people on their positions but consider that your role as facilitator is to engage, even provoke participants but not to debate them. *How to do this:* Ask them guiding (not leading) questions like “why” or “please expand” or “say more.”

Planning the Introduction

Student Facilitators can use this sheet to plan the introduction of their Speak Truth session.

Describe your warm-up activity:

How will this activity help people to learn names?

How will this activity help people to get to know each other better?

Can every attendee participate in this activity in a short amount of time?
How?

What will you do to engage everyone if only a few people participate at the outset?

Crafting Questions

Student Facilitators can use this sheet to plan the questions for their Speak Truth session.

Open-ended questions are best for fueling discussion. Here are some examples of sentence stems that will help you to create open-ended questions:

- What are the advantages/disadvantages of ...?
- What solutions could you suggest to the problem of ...?
- What would happen if...
- Why do you think...
- What reasons would you give for...
- What choice would you have made...

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

Question 4:

Question 5:

Question 6:

Question 7:

Question 8:

Question 9:

Question 10:

Prep Session 3: Discussion Outline and Practice

OUTLINE THE DISCUSSION

Plan with the student-facilitator the timing and sequence of:

- How they will open the session.
- How much time they'll take for the introductory activity.
- How much time they'll take for each question (understanding that they'll judge by the flow of the conversation when to go faster / slower / add additional questions).
- How they'll share the questions in written in addition to verbal form for the group. (If the discussion is via video conference they will want to post questions in the chat.)
- How they will invite feedback (Will there be a survey, or a final reflective question?)
- How they will close the discussion.

PRACTICE

Discuss methods for creating a supportive learning environment during the discussion. This will include things like:

- Acknowledging all participants by name.
- Asking for further clarification when a point someone makes needs more context.
- Understanding what to do if a participant is dominating the discussion and knowing how to intervene to create room for more voices.
- Understanding what to do if a participant is negatively impacting the community with hurtful comments.
- Strategies for inviting participation from quiet attendees.
- Being aware of the stance of an active listener.

Moving a Discussion Forward

Brainstorm

Invite lots of ideas in response to a prompt. Repeat back what is said from time to time so people know they are heard.

Demonstrate Active Listening

Focus your attention on each speaker. Accept everyone's words and approach each speaker's words as if you could be changed by what you hear.

Scaffold Participation Risk

Don't start the discussion with a gut-wrenching debate but don't avoid doing that debate eventually if it's what is needed to meet your goals. Build up to it. Begin with questions in which everyone can participate safely on equal ground. Build up to questions that invite different perspectives but be an enforcer of expectations and hold people publicly accountable for demonstrating mutual respect. Reach the debate when you know people can disagree thoughtfully and take care of one another even when they might not see eye to eye.

Use Silence

Embrace a pregnant pause. If you know you've asked the right question, you can wait and let them mull it over for a minute. Say: "This is a complicated question. Take a minute."



Follow-Up Questions

Ways to follow-up on things participants say:

- How do you know?
- What makes you say that?
- Can you share an example?
- Why do you think that's the case?
- Who has a different perspective to offer?
- I want to be sure I fully understand. Explain that again.
- What I hear you saying is _____. Is that correct?
- Did anyone notice _____? What did that make you think?
- If you wanted to _____, what might you do?

Creating a Supportive Environment

To create a supportive environment where all discussion participants can learn from one another, consider the following:

- Actively listen to know where and when to jump in.
- Remember NOT to debate participants--let the discussion go where participants lead it.
- Create space for participants to take over (but not derail) by encouraging them to speak from their personal experience by using the “I” pronoun
- Use data and questions that ask for participants to expound to steer the conversation.
 - Example A: On the topic of “wealth inequality in America,” Camara, a participant, points to the happiness scale--on which countries are graded based on the self-reporting of their citizens--and asks her peers what it would take to place the U.S.A on or at the top of this list.
 - Example B: On the topic of “destigmatizing mental health,” Micah, an 11th grader, asks his peers to consider the stigma around mental health in the early 1900s and how that may have “...paved the way for mental health ignorance, today.”



Discussion Outline

Student Facilitators can use this sheet to plan their Speak Truth outline.

Topic:

Time	Activity	Description
	Warm Up	
	Question 1	
	Question 2	
	Question 3	
	Question 4	
	Question 5	
	Question 6	
	Question 7	
	Question 8	
	Question 9	
	Question 10	
	Reflection / Closing	

Adena's Story

In order to maintain an objective perspective when leading a Speak Truth discussion, I remind myself that I am not hosting a session to educate others on my personal interest on the topic but to educate myself in the opinions and viewpoints of others and to share that rich information with a wider community. **Speak Truth discussions are all about becoming a better person. You learn how to collect and analyze a variety of opinions from a variety of backgrounds and sources. And these skills can teach you how to be a better community member.**

If another student says something I really object to on a personal level during a conversation, I always turn my energy onto the group. I do not say: I disagree because "A,B,C," because I am a moderator. Instead, I say, "Can anyone else elaborate on this viewpoint?" "Who has some thoughts on that?" "Who can enlighten me with some more information about this topic/viewpoint?" There will always be many things to disagree with, but it is beneficial to understand them first.

What I found difficult and rewarding about facilitating is that it highlights for me that I live in a very liberal/minority/female bubble, so I can be naive in wondering why bad things happen when the solution is so obvious to me. Speak Truth offers the benefit of gaining insight into a different opinion. I may not agree but I am able to better understand that type of mindset and utilize that information to my advantage, whether it be a future professional environment or everyday interaction. I can now engage situations with these conflicting

individuals with more insight.

Although it is difficult to mask my disagreement, I like to make sure the discussion remains a safe space, not one of judgment.

Adena, 12th Grade





Teacher Talk: Is it hard for students to take control of the discussion?

“There’s something to be said for the excitement of being with your peers. There’s a cool topic under discussion, there are adults around, but when you realize they won’t say a damn thing and it’s really your discussion, that’s kind of an exciting moment. Students have this moment of awakening when they realize the only way the discussion will move forward is when they, the young people speak. That doesn’t happen very much, at least not in academic discussion. In Speak Truth sessions, students are brought together for an academic discussion, but the teacher is quiet, and students see, ‘Oh, the person leading looks like me, and is my age, they are the leader, it’s up to us to have this discussion or not.’”

Cosby Hunt, Director of Youth Programming



Summaries from Past Speak Truth Sessions

The Morality of Wealth

Speak Truth students analyze wealth inequalities in the modern age, as seen through the lens of *A Christmas Carol*.

Gentrification

How has gentrification impacted you? Many students at this Speak Truth session spoke of the impacts on the communities where they live.

Cancel Culture

Students debated the efficacy of cancel culture in this Speak Truth discussion, noting its particular implications for their generation.

COVID and Voter Suppression

On Thursday, November 5, 2020 students from across the Washington, DC region gathered to discuss this timely topic.

The Dehumanization of Black Women

“I think it’s so important that we don’t bubble wrap things for teenagers. We deserve the provocative.” – Adena, Student-Facilitator for this session

Destigmatizing Mental Health

What do young people think about the state of mental health in the United States? In this Speak Truth seminar, we found out.

What is Consent?

Students don’t get enough opportunities to talk about issues that impact their lives; but Speak Truth offers a safe space for these conversations.

With Appreciation

Speak Truth was conceived of by **Cosby Hunt** and, for many years, run by **Max Peterson**. This Guidebook, which captures their work, was created by **Jenna Fournel**. The input of over a thousand students and teachers over the years has made Speak Truth what it is today. The program and this Guidebook are also made possible by contributions from our Inspired Teaching colleagues, notably:

Bella Cavicchi Kaneia Crumlin Nina Pulley
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