

DISCUSSION LAB PLANNING SHEET

Directions

- 1. Choose a discussion leader.** Choose one member of your group who is willing to lead a discussion with a small group. Quickly choose a topic from the list below (or come up with your own) with which the discussion leader is comfortable facilitating.
- 2. Together, discuss and plan.**
 - Choose the goal(s) you might have for the discussion. (Refer to the *Goals and Instructor Moves for Productive Discussion* handout).
 - Brainstorm potential follow-up questions, instructor actions, and/or interesting content to use during the discussion.
 - Think about directions the discussion might go and how the discussion might be best concluded. Be prepared to flow with the discussion and what participants bring up.
- 3. Discussion leaders switch groups, so every group has a new “instructor”:**
 - Each discussion leader shifts to a new group.
 - Choose one person in the group to observe and take notes about the discussion.
 - The instructor facilitates the discussion.

Possible Discussion Topics

Environmental Issues

Note: These discussions may provoke passionate opinions, and the instructor needs to handle these with sensitivity. These discussions are richer when learners have already explored and discussed discoveries, and when they have had some discussions about concepts. Generally, instructors can introduce key evidence, but they should hold back from sharing their own opinions. Discussing local environmental issues in learners’ communities, and particularly issues related to environmental justice, can be a strategy for making learning experiences relevant to learners’ lived experiences.

- *Should wolves (or another organism) be (re)introduced to the ecosystem we are in?*
- *Should humans let wildfires burn?*
- *Should wilderness areas be off limits to humans?*
- *Should invasive species be exterminated?*

DISCUSSION LAB PLANNING SHEET (continued)

Conceptual Development

Note: It can be challenging during these discussions to juggle learners' accurate and inaccurate developing ideas. Generally, instructors may occasionally introduce information to inform the discussion, but they should not offer a "right" answer to the main question being discussed at the moment or hint that a learner's answer is correct or incorrect. It may be appropriate to do so later.

- *Can humans be considered decomposers? What about other animals?*
- *How do you think decomposition might happen in the ocean?*
- *When the Texas Horned Lizard feels threatened, it shoots blood out of its eyes (or name any other interesting animal adaptation). How do you think this adaptation developed over many generations?*
- *What are some examples of organisms' characteristics that are NOT adaptations?*
- *How do fungi get energy and matter to survive?*

Nature Engagement

Note: These discussions are appropriate when your group has just observed an interesting nature interaction or has compelling evidence of a nature interaction available so all learners have had a shared experience and have something to contribute. They tend to be the easiest type of discussion to lead and participate in and can serve as a good way to introduce learners to discussion and for instructors to get used to leading discussion. (These types of discussions likely aren't appropriate for the Discussion Lab experience, unless you have something specific to observe.)

- *What happened here (at site of evidence of interesting interaction, such as a bird kill, bones, tracks, etc.)?*
- *What are some possible explanations for what we just observed (after observing an interesting nature interaction, such as predator-prey interaction, interesting animal behavior, etc.)?*

Tips

- **Listen and probe.** Most important is to carefully listen to what discussion participants have to say and what they are interested in, and let that guide the discussion. Be authentically curious about and probe to find out more about what participants are thinking.
- **Plan and improvise.** Don't get stuck on where you think the discussion should go. But be prepared to refocus the discussion if it wanders too far afield or to ask another question if participants are losing interest.

