

Structured Classroom Conversations with QSSSA

Source: Seidlitz, J. & Castillo, M. (2013). *Language and Literacy for ELLs: Creating Systematic Change for Academic Achievement*.

QSSSA is strategy teachers can use effectively across content areas and grade levels. This strategy is especially effective with ELs as it engages the entire class. Research supports the fact that **students need to talk about their learning**. Engaging students in small-group, academic conversations is one of the most effective ways to:

- enhance comprehension,
- reduce misbehavior,
- build academic language proficiency,
- support literacy,
- develop socioemotional skills,
- promote question-asking and deep thinking, and
- create a sense of community within the classroom.

Question 	First, pose an open-ended question. Rather than a closed-ended, recall-based question that can probably be answered in one word, plan out a question that can be answered correctly in multiple ways and requires some elaboration. Some examples: • <i>What do you think was the most important technological innovation of the Tang dynasty?</i> • <i>How are quadrilaterals different from other polygons?</i> • <i>How is condensation related to precipitation?</i> • <i>How did the author convey the theme of betrayal?</i> • <i>How do converging lines create perspective in paintings?</i>
Signal 	Ask students to make some kind of gesture—raise their hands, put their fists on their chins, stand up, or put their hands flat on the desk, for example—and instruct them to show that they are ready to answer the question by <i>undoing</i> the gesture (sitting down, or lowering their hands, e.g.). This gives students exactly as much think time as they need (especially when cueing students to a resource), and the kinesthetic nature of the gesture activates their thinking. The signal ensures total participation and communicates to students that everyone's voice matters.

Stem 	Provide a sentence stem/starter/frame that is appropriate for students’ levels of target language proficiency. This might mean a rewording of the question for learners who are fluent or nearly fluent in the target language (“<i>Condensation is related to precipitation because...</i>”) or a simplification of the required language for beginner-level emergent bilingual students (“<i>I notice that converging lines...</i>”). Other examples: ● <i>...causes the day-night cycle.</i> ● <i>I can infer that...because...</i> ● <i>The author chose to write Pura’s story because...</i> ● <i>The author’s purpose is...</i> ● <i>I can show subtraction using base ten by...</i> ● <i>I calculate the slope by...</i> ● <i>The author makes a strong argument for their opinion because...</i> ● <i>I agree/disagree with... because ...</i>
Share 	Have students share their answers to the question using the sentence stem, with partners or in small groups. Importantly, specify clearly with whom they’ll be sharing their response: their elbow partner, their table group, or maybe another designated “away” partner in the room. Equally important: specify which student will share first, using a random indicator.
Assess 	Lastly, ask students to share in the whole group. Having a randomization system (such as drawing from popsicle sticks or index cards with students’ names or a digital wheel of names) is the most effective way to do this, especially when used regularly, because students are more attuned to their conversations as a way to prepare to be called on. Alternatively, teachers can equitably assess students by calling on one student from each group, or by having all students write down a response. Assessment strategies such as these help ensure student engagement throughout the entire activity, since students know they will be held accountable for their learning by the end of the activity. Assessing equitably and holding students accountable for their learning are so important because they communicate to the class that every student’s voice matters, and we are all equally invested in our learning.

Let's Plan!

Q Question	Class, without calling out a response, think about this question.		
S Signal	When you think you have a response, let us know by...		
S Stem	When you discuss your response, we want to use this stem...		
S Share	Turn to your _____ and discuss.		
A Assess	We will select students to share answers...		

Example Questions and Stems for *Arts & Letters*TM Curriculum

Grade 2 Module 1 Essential Question: How does seasonal change affect nature and people?

What do you notice? What do you wonder?

I see...

I notice...

I wonder...

What is the setting? How do you know?

The setting is... I know because I see...

Who are the characters? How do you know?

The characters are... I know because I see...

What do you think will happen right after this scene?

After this scene...

What do you think happened right before this scene?

Before this scene...

Why do you think the artist chose to paint this picture? What story is being told?

The artist painted this picture to/because...

The story the artist is telling is...

What season is it? What evidence from the painting makes you say that?

I believe it is... because ...

What would be different if this were a different season?

If it were [summer, autumn/fall, winter, spring] , there would be/we would see ... because...

What feeling does this painting provoke?

This painting makes me feel...

How does our understanding of this artwork change when we understand some of the history of it/the artist?

I used to think/see...

Now I think/see...