

Activity: Burke's Parlor Discussion

Source: Andrea West, English

Materials needed: D2L discussion board

Goals: Students will analyze and describe the voices in the conversation around the relevant topic.

Assessment: Feedback based on quality of response

Graded? Yes

Method: Use this activity when students must engage with research or public responses to a relevant class issue. In a unit that requires thoughtful response to other voices, introduce the concept of Burke's Parlor. Use the assignment below to initiate a discussion that begins student response to the topic.

You can include this original text from **Kenneth Burke** about the concept:

"Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress."

The Philosophy of Literary Form 110-111

Assignment: In a well-developed paragraph, explain a time when you entered a metaphorical parlor where you have arrived late and "others have long preceded you and they are engaged in a heated discussion." (Please note that "heated" doesn't necessarily mean "contentious." The metaphor exists to explain any in-depth conversation. In fact, I'd like us to get away from the idea of debates being the only kind of arguments. An in-depth discussion can be informative just as well.)

What did you do to catch "the tenor of the argument"? **In other words, what did you need to do before you could "put in your oar"?**

Requirements of this assignment: **Write your response (100-200 words, minimum) and then respond at least once to one of your classmates.** The discussion board is set up that you have to post once to be able to see your classmates' original posts

Make sure your responses to your classmates are substantive. In other words, avoid the "I agree" reply.