



Goal

The goal of the literary salon is connection through shared experiences. It offers us the chance to practice meaningful conversation by drawing open-ended questions from bags and answering them.

Rules

The guiding principle for the salon is respect. Participants must agree to hold the dignity of every person by keeping the space safe, open and respectful for sharing.

There are 3 rules:

- 1) *Only share what you feel comfortable sharing.*
- 2) *Keep everything confidential.*
- 3) *This is not a debate.*

Benefits

We build compassion when we learn to listen to others. In the salon, we search for those “me too” moments of identification and feel a closer connection because we can relate to another’s experience or emotions in a supportive and safe environment.

Group dialogue allows us to practice many important skills:

- *Holding physical and emotional space for others*
- *Paying attention to body language, tone of voice and facial expressions*
- *Choosing when to speak and when to stay silent*
- *Staying present and attuned to others by listening*
- *Cultivating and demonstrating empathy*
- *Voicing our own ideas while respecting the differing opinions of others*
- *Experiencing vulnerability*

Some students expressed a desire to build their confidence in face-to-face discussions for upcoming job and university interviews. When the salons were completed, many students were surprised to discover a different side to their peers, realizing that they are more alike than different.

Format

The students begin with an individual journaling exercise, answering a few questions on fear and self-care to gently ease into the salon. Then students introduce themselves, saying what they hope to receive from engaging in group conversation. I read from one of my essays to demonstrate vulnerable sharing and I ask students to draw out a few key themes from the writing. Then we break into groups of six to eight and spend the rest of the class time in guided discussion. All of the questions for students focus on personal growth. We begin with icebreaker questions and move on to deeper, more meaningful topics common to everyone. The teacher and I rotate from group to group, participating in the conversation and modeling honest sharing.

Teacher Testimonial

“My ELA 20-2 and 30-1 classes had the absolute pleasure of experiencing Julianne Harvey's Literary Salons in November of 2015. Ms. Harvey's ease and comfort in front of the students set the tone for an interesting and enlightening morning of thought, exploration and conversation. The format of the Literary Salon lends itself to gently easing the students into the exercise, allowing them to understand the process without trepidation. The Salon itself is extremely well organized and moves seamlessly from beginning to end. Students in both classes were quickly engaged and delved into the conversation exercises with vim. I was amazed and enthralled to watch the students answer questions about themselves and the world around them without hesitation. After the session, students commented on how wonderful the experience was for them. Of note are the following student comments:

‘It was so nice to come into class on a Monday morning and get to engage in conversation that was interesting and relaxing.’

‘It was really neat to learn things about people we have known for years.’

In this time of ‘connectedness’ that truly lends itself to a lack of connectedness, I feel like these Literary Salons provide the students with an excellent platform for re-learning and re-envisioning what it means to truly engage in meaningful conversation. It is a wonderful scaffolding piece to a unit on Personal Response, encouraging the students to connect with themselves and others regarding important themes and issues. I would do this again, even with the same students!”

- Shelley Cunningham, ELA Teacher at W.G. Murdoch High School in Crossfield, AB



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