



MONASH  
College

## Socratic Circles

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## Challenges observed

*Students have problems with:*

- articulating a **true understanding** of texts
- making use of texts in discussions
- writing coherent notes, annotating
- actively listening to each other in discussions

**expected:**

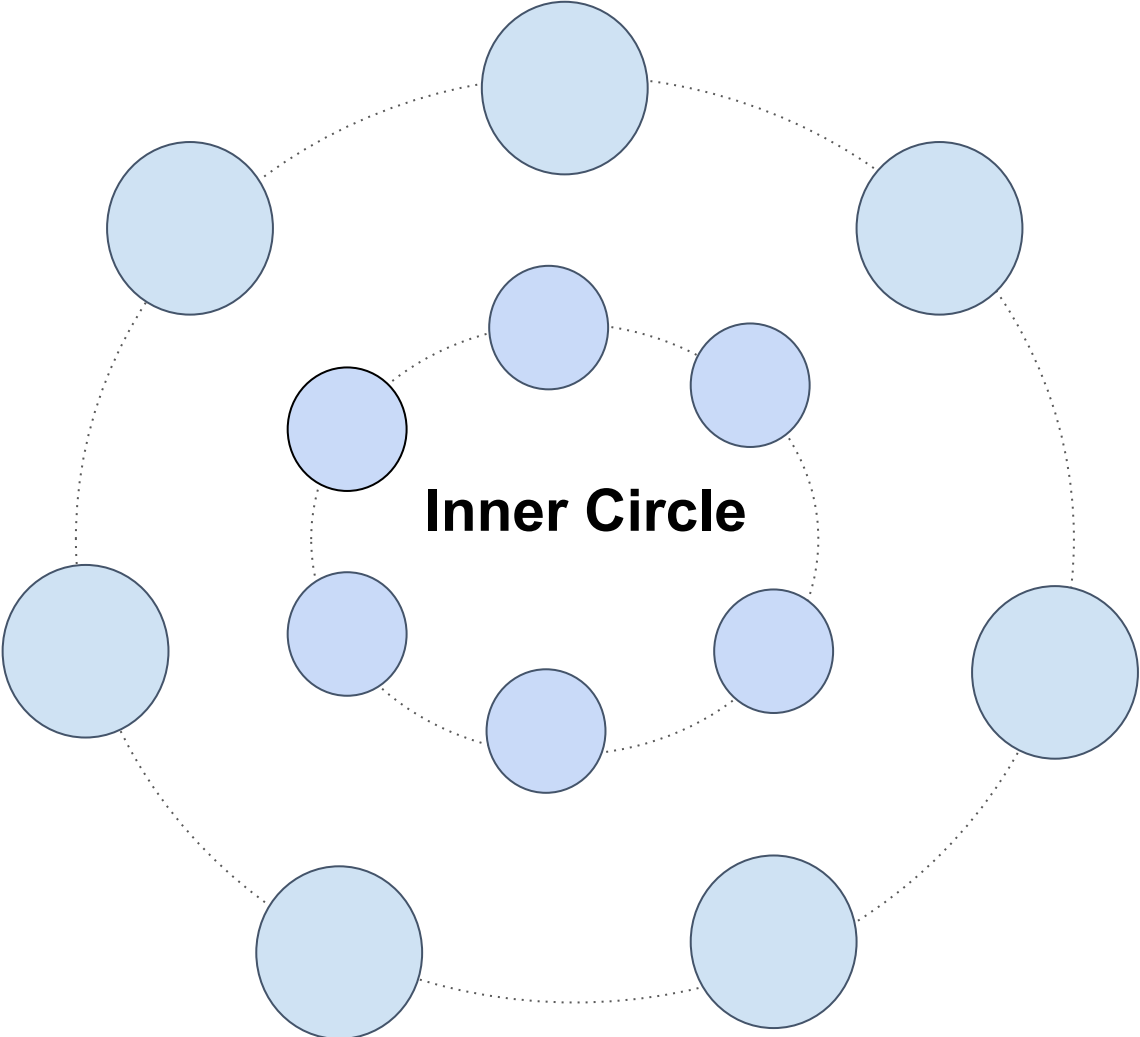
- *read academic texts*
- *made an attempt to understand them*
- *attend tutorials ready to ask questions*
- *discuss opinions, interpretations of these texts with peers*

1. What **skills** do our students need to be able to do this?
2. How can we/do we **prepare** students for this kind of activity?
3. What **challenges** do students face with these expectations?

## What is a **Socratic Circle**?

- the teacher chooses texts for discussion
- students annotate the text and prepare to discuss the topic
- students form two circles of between 6-10
- one circle of students sits inside the other circle

**Outer Circle**



**Inner Circle**

## What is a **Socratic Circle**?

- inner circle discusses the text for 8-10 min
- outer circle observes and takes notes
- outer circle provides feedback on inner circle
- two circles swap and the process is repeated

# How to set it up:

explain task

# Step 1:

Text: **This morning's PD**

Q: **What are the features that make a **successful PD**?**



# Step 2:

Pre-task



## Socratic Circles

**Write three main ideas that are in the text. Swap this paper with a partner. Write three follow-up questions on your partner's paper.**

	Main ideas	Follow-up question:
1.		
2.		
3.		

## What makes a good discussion? Rank most important to least important: 1-8

1.	Body language that shows you are listening (e.g. <i>eye contact, open posture</i> )	
2.	Interrupting (e.g. <i>hand gestures, or but, no, yes</i> )	
3.	Adding a new idea	
4.	Giving an example for your opinion	
5.	Follow-up questions	
6.	Speaking clearly and loudly	
8.	Giving a new opinion	
9.	Checking you understood what another person said	

***Deeper Thinking:***

*Topics focussed on in the media will often be discussed in the wider community. It is through this discourse that ideas are furthered. This exchange of ideas leads to a deeper understanding of the topic furthering the development of the discourse within the community. Throughout these conversations we understand more perspectives and connect ideas better.*

**Think about what really interests you in this topic.**

**Make a question that you would like to know the answer to, which can not be found in the text:**

*Your question will contribute to furthering this conversation.*

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# Step 3:

Circle set up





# Step 4: roles

role cards

I want to speak

background

# role cards set 1

it is strong to speak

What suggestions do you have for the group?

Listen to others more carefully

Name:.....

Who helped the conversation flow to others?

.....

Was there a leader?

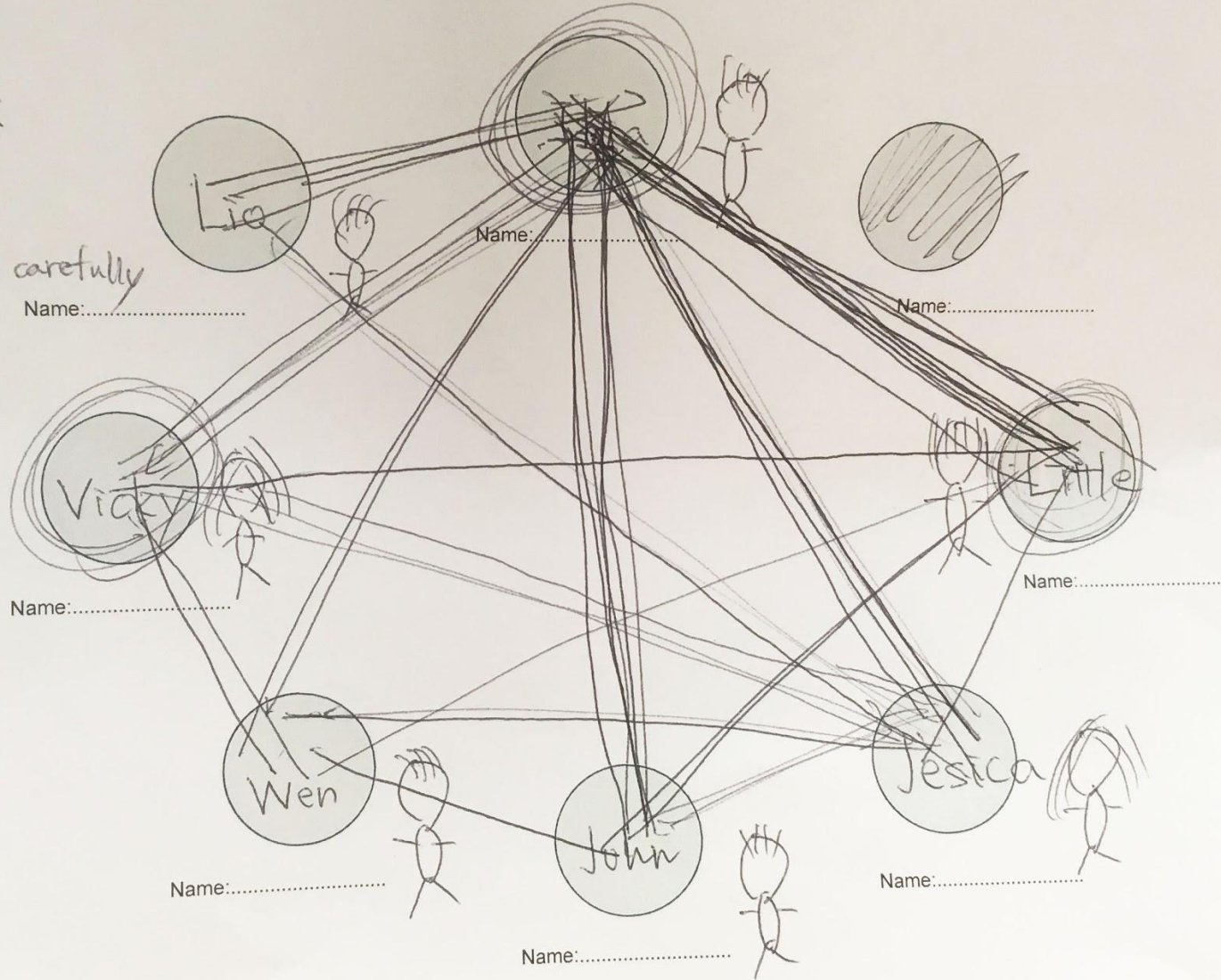
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What conclusions do you have?

.....

Any other observations?

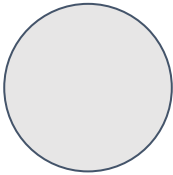
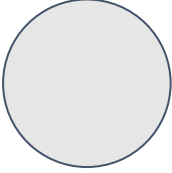
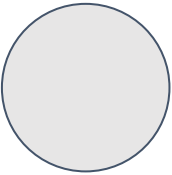
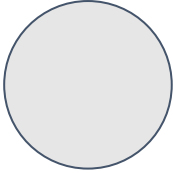
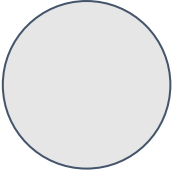
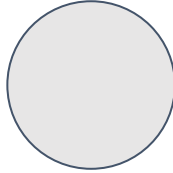
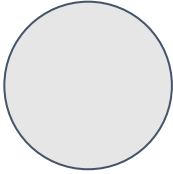
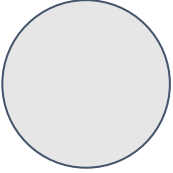
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Role card: #1



 Name:.....	 Name:.....	 Name:.....
 Name:.....		 Name:.....
 Name:.....	 Name:.....	 Name:.....

*After Observation:*

Observations:

.....  
.....  
.....

What suggestions do you have for the group?

.....  
.....  
.....



### Body Language

	Who:	Body language observed:	Positive / Negative
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

*After Observation*

Who had the most effective body language and why?.....

What are some suggestions for the group?.....



IDEAS				
	Who?	Idea	Example or evidence given, referred to the text <i>(E.G. according to the article..)</i>	Reactions: <i>(nod/ smile/ agreement 'yes'...)</i>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

*After Observation:* Evaluate the ideas? Which worked well and why? Which linked with other ideas? .....

# Step 5:

conversation

text: **This morning's PD**

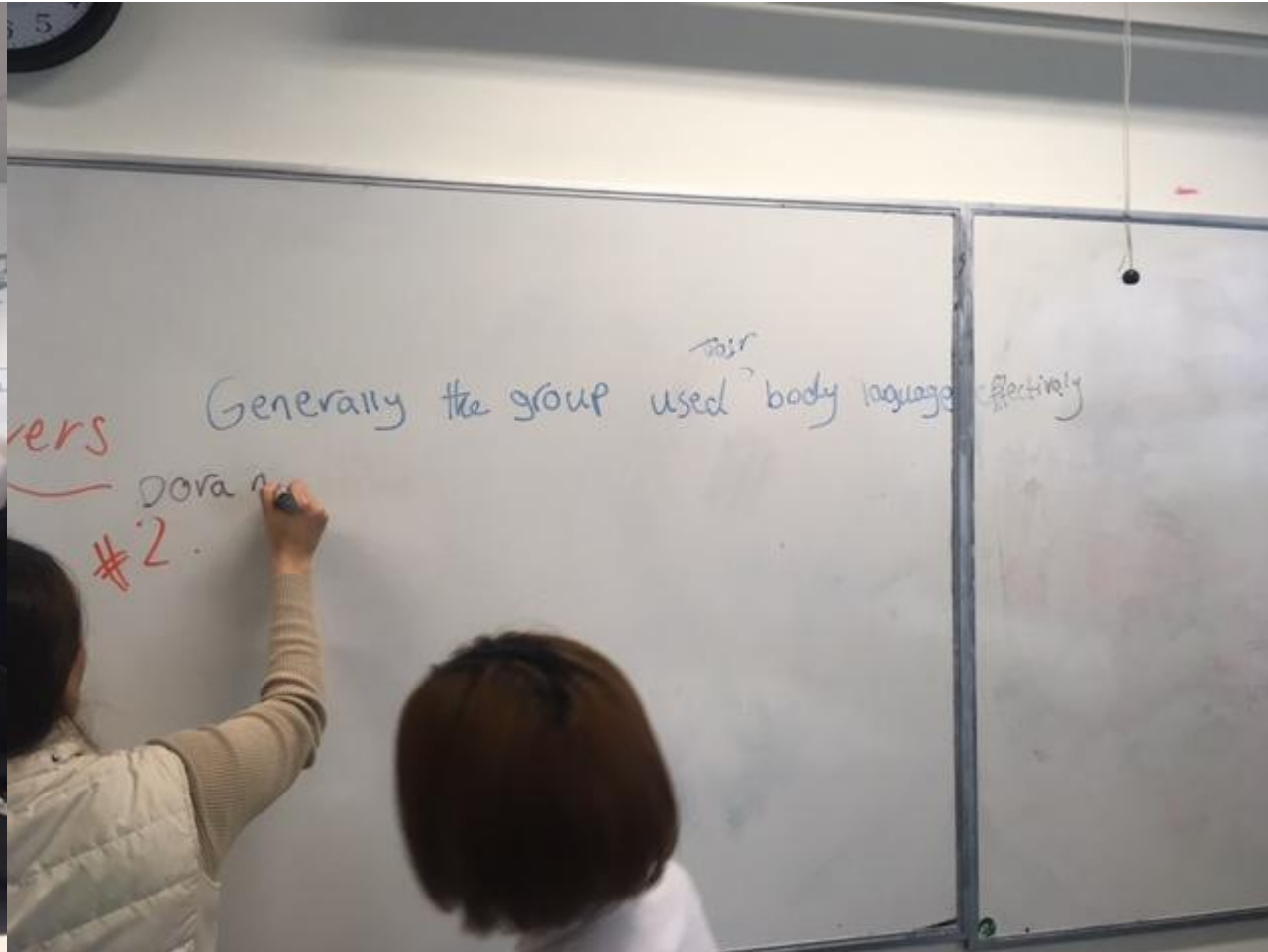
Q: **What are the features that make a **successful PD**?**

# Step 6:

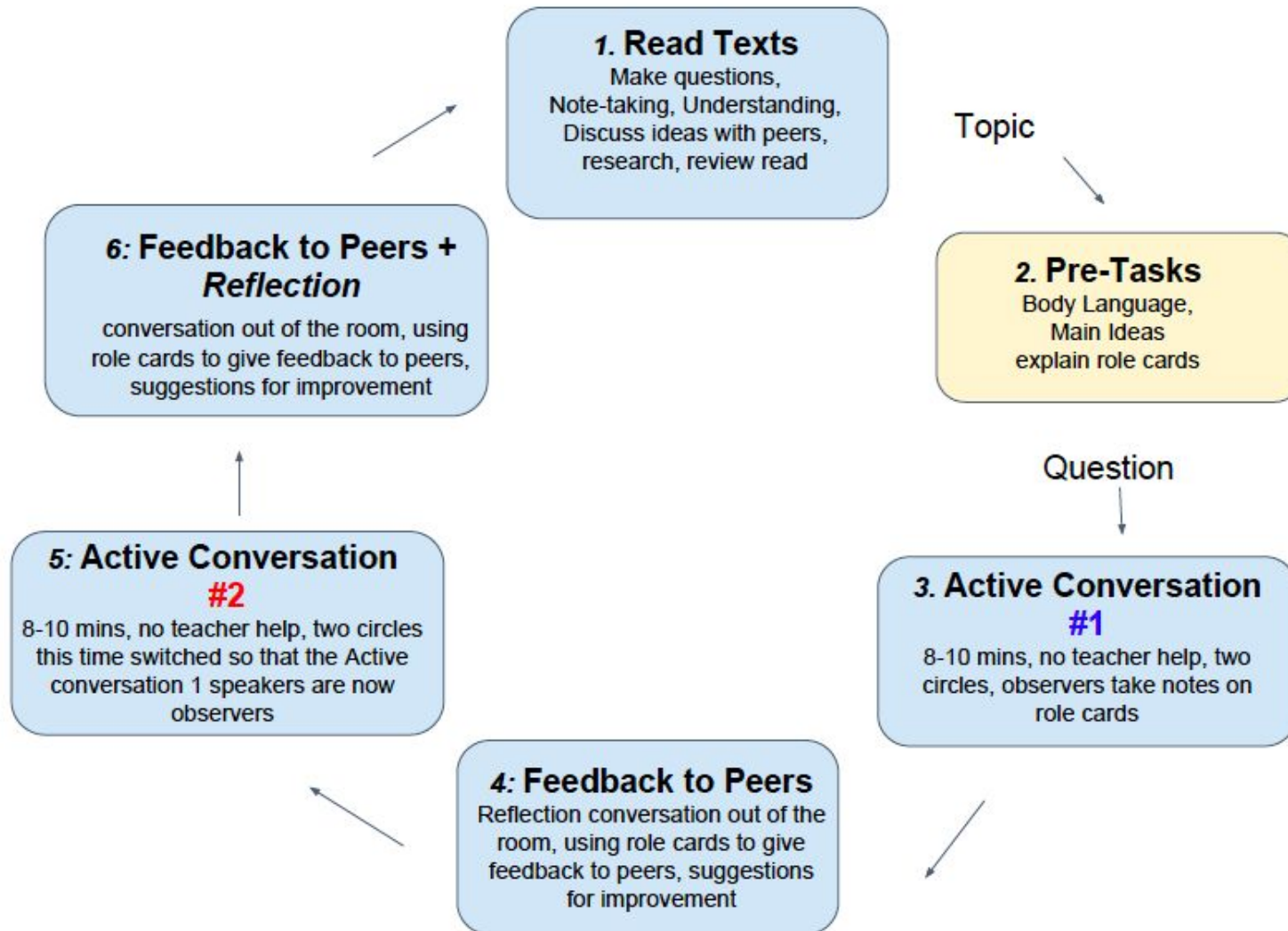
inner circle leaves classroom to discuss

# Step 7: feedback

present feedback: each group







## Socratic Seminars

*Definition:*

Readings of Texts, scaffolding, preparing for a conversation watched by peers, feedback

*Aim:* To help in preparation for pathway

Timeline suggested:

**Day 1:** Set texts to be read for homework

**Day 2:** Pre Task 1

**Day 3:** Pre Task 2 + Active Conv #1

Feedback + Action Conv #2 + Feedback

# Practical considerations

- 6-10 students in each circle
- 8 - 10 mins for discussion time
- outer circle is crucial
- may take several attempts to really work with a class

## Successful texts:

- Challenging
- Relatable
- Interesting
- Involves values
- Linked

## Why are Socratic Circles **effective**?

Reading is given a purpose.

Discussion is informed and student directed.

Students are motivated to contribute.

Feedback offers opportunity for reflection.

The process is repeatable and students improve with practice.

# Questions

## **Socratic circles work best when students:**

- refer explicitly to the text
- use examples from their own experience
- actively listen and ask further questions
- form and articulate clear opinions
- provide constructive feedback

The second discussion of the text shows an awareness of the previous discussion and builds upon points previously raised.

Questions	Linking	
<p><b>Clarification:</b> (E.G. What do you mean by...?)</p>	<p><b>Summarising/ Paraphrasing ideas:</b> (E.G. What &lt;student name&gt; means is.....or When you say.....do you mean... So you think that...)</p>	<p><b>Holding the Floor:</b> (E.G. As I was saying... Excuse me, I'd like to finish my idea fist...)</p>
<p><b>Evidence:</b> (E.G. What evidence is there to support..?)</p>	<p><b>Acknowledging ideas:</b> (E.G. I agree with &lt;student name&gt;... , My idea follows on from.....)</p>	<p><b>Questions about Assumptions:</b> (E.G. What are you assuming when you say that? Do you have any evidence to support that assumption?)</p>
<p><b>Viewpoints:</b> (E.G. &lt;student name&gt; you seem to be looking at the issue from... point of view, why do you see the issue this way?)</p>	<p><b>Disagreeing:</b> (E.G. I don't agree with you because... , I agree with you on some points, but...)</p>	<p><b>Questions that Encourage Reasons:</b> (E.G. How can we find out? How could someone solve this problem? Why is this important?)</p>

Role cards: #4



After Observation:

Do you think the group used questions well?

Which box could be used more?

What could you suggest for further improvement?

Role cards: #5



	Vocabulary that is specific to the topic found in the texts: (make a list)	✓	Who said the word:
1			who:
2			who:
3			who:
4			who:
5			who:
6			who:
7			who:
8			who:
9			who:
10			who:

	Vocabulary that is specific to the topic found in the texts: (make a list)	✓	Who said the word:
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6			who:
7			who:
8			who:
9			who:
10			who:

	Phrases	✓	Who said the word:
1			who:
2			who:
3			who:
4			who:
5			who:

After Observation:



Role cards: #6



	Key Ideas from the text (to be listed with a few students helping)	✓	Who said the idea
1			who:
2			who:
3			who:
4			who:
5			who:
6			who:
7			who:
8			who:
9			who:
10			who:

Vocabulary  
Brainstorm:

After Observation: