A Quote Opens the Conversation

Make human connection a deliberate part of the lesson plan.

Champions of Learning adaptation inspired by Dr. Steve Fouts and Dan Fouts, co-founders of Teach Different. Suggested classroom practice, not their exact lesson plan or an endorsed training resource.



The teaching connection
Teach Different uses a quotation to explore a claim, counterclaim and essential question. Its pyramid places storytelling at their intersection.

Suggested: Grades 6-12; humanities or advisory
Time: 20 minutes, plus 10-15 minutes preparation
Estimated cost: $0 with existing supplies; printing extra.

Learn the craft with other educators

This guide is a starting point, not a substitute for Teach Different's professional development. Go beyond following steps: experience facilitated conversations, examine teaching choices and practice with feedback. Explore their professional development and educator community to exchange classroom experiences and learn with other humans. Optional AI planning prompts cannot replace live practice, relationships or colleagues' judgment.

Learning goal and preparation

Interpret a claim, explain a defensible alternative and respond to a peer's reasoning. Select a short, age-appropriate quote tied to [curriculum topic]. Check its wording, attribution and context. Prepare paper, pencils and a visible prompt. Agree to challenge ideas respectfully and allow students to pass on personal sharing.

Try it in five steps

1. Read and think (3 minutes). Display the quote. Give quiet writing time: What might it mean? For the illustration's quote about being alone or in bad company, retain the qualified attribution; verify it before naming an author as certain.

2. Explore the claim (4 minutes). Invite interpretations and reasons. Ask learners to explain a peer's idea before adding their own. A historical, literary or invented example is welcome; personal disclosure is optional.

3. Consider a counterclaim (4 minutes). Ask when a different perspective might be reasonable. Seek evidence and context. Examining an idea does not require students to endorse it or debate anyone's dignity.

4. Find the essential question (5 minutes). Build a question from the tension. For example: When does being alone help us, and when do we need others? Offer partner rehearsal, writing or speaking as ways to contribute.

5. Reflect and return (4 minutes). Ask what a peer helped the learner reconsider. Note reasoning, evidence and references to peers' ideas. Choose one question to revisit in the next lesson.

Access, care and an everyday routine

Read the quote aloud; offer large print, accessible text, vocabulary support, home-language planning and processing time. Printed cards and a board provide an offline route. Use fictional examples and a pass option; never require accounts of grief or trauma. Repeat a short version regularly, varying the quote and access supports. Assess the thinking, not how much a learner speaks. Extend with a source comparison or a written revision of the claim.

Three Optional AI Planning Prompts

Replace [bracketed fields]. These optional aids are for preparation. They cannot replace human conversation, professional development or educator community. They do not imply the Fouts brothers used AI in this way. Use school-approved tools only; never enter identifiable student information.

1 Plan a purposeful conversation

Help me plan a [minutes]-minute discussion for [grade/subject] using this verified quote and context: [quote, source and context]. Our learning goal is [goal]. Include private thinking, a claim, a defensible counterclaim and an essential question. Build in peer listening and supports for [access/language needs]. Make personal sharing optional. Distinguish proposed questions from verified facts; do not invent quotations or attributions.

Educator check: Check the original source, curriculum fit, timing and suitability. Offline route: plan the sequence on paper with a colleague.

2 Create response materials

Using only [verified quote and source context], draft a one-page response sheet for [grade]. Include space to interpret the claim, consider a counterclaim, record a peer's idea and propose a question. Add [number] optional sentence starters and [access supports]. Offer fictional or text-based examples instead of requiring personal stories. Do not fabricate student responses or label these materials as official Teach Different resources.

Educator check: Check wording, attribution, accessibility and student choice. Offline route: draw four response spaces and write your own sentence starters.

3 Reflect and improve tomorrow's discussion

Review these anonymous class-level observations: [patterns of reasoning, peer references, questions and participation]. Our goal was [goal]. Suggest two changes for the next discussion, each tied to observed evidence. Separate observations from possible explanations. Do not diagnose students, equate silence with disengagement or claim the discussion caused improvement. Propose a brief follow-up check.

Educator check: Use your judgment and actual work to assess suggestions. Offline route: sort anonymous observations into strengths, questions and one next step.

Credits and research

Teach Different | Official framework and conversation resources

Teach Different | Original pyramid handout and example quotation

NCSS | Teach Different workshop: using quotes for classroom discussions

Illinois State University | Deliberative dialogues revisited, February 12, 2025

Research connection: Illinois State reported findings on facilitated college dialogue involving perspective-taking and community. This university report was not a journal publication or a test of Teach Different. Illustration: conceptual artwork adapting Teach Different's pyramid; fictional figures, no student work.