

elements together, and discuss it using their elements and language charts. Eventually, students read and analyze a fairy tale independently using a graphic organizer to record their responses. They then come together and have a discussion around what they have found. This application activity presents several ways to create opportunities for academic discussion. To support students in participating in academic discussion, some lower proficiency level ELs may need opportunities to get more comfortable speaking in class in general.

## What Are Some Activities for Supporting ELs' Oral Language Development?

There are many different oral language activities that you can use in your classroom. As you are deciding what activity to use, reflect on your learning objectives for the activity and what type of activity will best help your students meet those objectives. Also, remember, the activity should accomplish the following goals:

- Provide students opportunities to hear and practice key academic language.
- Be structured in such a way so that all students will have an opportunity (and sufficient support) to share their ideas.
- Push student understanding of content to deeper levels.

We have described a few of our favorite activities to support ELs' oral language development here, beginning with a more in-depth description of Socratic circles. You can adapt these activities to meet the specific needs of the ELs in your classroom by providing various types of scaffolding, such as sentence frames, sentence stems, word banks, and strategic student grouping. You can also encourage (or require) students to use specific vocabulary in their conversations.

### Socratic Circle

We would first like to explain an activity that may take a bit more preparation to use successfully with ELs but one that can be highly effective for all students once they are familiar with the process. It is most commonly used with middle and high school students. A Socratic circle, also known as Socratic seminar, is a teaching strategy used to support deep understanding of a specific piece of writing, music, or art. It is based on Socrates's belief in the importance of developing students' ability to think

critically and independently through the use of dialogue. The focus of the Socratic method is on giving students questions rather than answers. By posing and responding to questions, students examine and reevaluate their beliefs on a particular topic. In addition to fostering critical thinking, Socratic circles are designed to support student collaboration, creativity, and intellectual curiosity.

Prior to the Socratic circle activity, students read, analyze, and take notes on a common “text”<sup>1</sup> (e.g., novel, poem, song, or painting). Students are then typically divided into two groups—an inner and an outer circle. The activity begins with the inner circle of students engaging in dialogue about the text and the outer circle observing. After a specified period of time, the outer circle provides feedback to the inner circle on their conversation, and the two groups of students switch roles. Throughout the activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator. The activity is not meant to result in a winning argument, as opposed to debates. Students are expected to use the text to support their ideas, ask questions, share their opinions, and build on the ideas of others.

Although they present great potential to engage students in discussions around complex text, Socratic circles can be especially challenging to ELs. First of all, the mere thought of having to speak about a nuanced topic in front of the entire class without linguistic support could be especially nerve racking for ELs who are at lower levels of proficiency (or shy students in general). In order to effectively participate in this type of discourse, ELs need to have a deep understanding of the text being discussed.

Also, the pace and language of the discussion may prove a challenge for some ELs who need time and support to “digest” what others are saying and frame their ideas before presenting them orally. In addition, without specific support, ELs may not have the academic language necessary to orally summarize, refute, or support the ideas of others. Figure 4.11 provides specific strategies to help ELs prepare for and participate in Socratic circles.

Eight additional activities for supporting ELs’ oral language follow.

### 1-3-6

In this activity, students are given a discussion question or task that they work on individually. Then, they move to a group of three where they discuss their responses to the question. Finally, two groups of three combine to form a group of six. With the group of six, they finalize their answers

1. For a more nuanced description of what text is, see Chapter 7.

FIGURE 4.11 Helping ELs Prepare for a Socratic Circle

Strategy	Recommendations for ELs
<p><b>Preparing for Socratic circles:</b> ELs need deep understanding of the text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure that students are adequately prepared for the activity by giving them sufficient scaffolding to understand the text (e.g., concise background knowledge, glossaries, and scaffolded text-dependent questions).</li> <li>• Provide students with graphic organizers to help them frame their thinking about the text in writing.</li> <li>• Give students practice and support in developing open-ended questions about a particular text.</li> <li>• Give students practice in anticipating the types of open-ended questions that other students might ask about a text.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Modeling:</b> ELs need to know what high-quality responses and questions sound like.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model a successful Socratic circle by first practicing the following steps with a familiar text at a lower level of complexity.</li> <li>• Provide ELs with opportunities to practice questioning and responding in small groups before expecting them to participate in a whole-class discussion.</li> <li>• Provide sentence stems that students can use in asking and responding to questions, clarifying others' ideas, and commenting on the ideas of others. Give students practice in using these stems.</li> <li>• Highlight questions or responses that are particularly effective. Explain why those particular questions or responses are of high quality.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Balancing Participation:</b> Help support ELs' participation in the discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If some students are dominating the discussion, limit all participants to a certain number of questions and responses.</li> <li>• Guide students to invite those who are less active to participate (e.g., "Marisol, what do you think about what Sam said?").</li> <li>• As the facilitator, use the last few minutes of the discussion to invite those students who haven't asked a question to take part in the discussion.</li> <li>• Be comfortable with silence. The time will allow those who need more time to think more opportunities to participate.</li> </ul>

Source: Staehr Fenner, D., & Snyder, S. (2015). Socratic circles and the Common Core: An introduction [blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/blog/socratic-circles-and-common-core-introduction-part-i>

to the question and present these to the large group. These three steps can provide ELs opportunities to practice and refine their language and deepen their thinking on the topic.<sup>2</sup>

2. In Mr. Sevin's ninth-grade Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) class, his students are asked to individually complete a graphic organizer in which they list the most important ideas from a chapter they have read. Then, students discuss their ideas in groups of three and four. Finally, two groups combine to further refine their answers and develop a short presentation of their responses that they present to the rest of the class (Teaching Channel, 2013).

## Action Thermometer

For this activity, you should decide on a statement that students can have an opinion about that is connected to your lesson. Ask students who agree with the statement to go to one end of the classroom. Students who disagree should go to the other end. Students who are neutral or undecided can go to the center of the room. Ask the students to find a partner in their group and share why they went where they did. You can also ask students to find someone in a different group to discuss why they went where they did. Call on a couple of students from each of the three groups to share what their partners said. Ask if any students have changed their minds after hearing the discussion.

## Carousel

To set up for this activity, write questions connected to the unit of study on poster paper and around the room. There should be one piece of poster paper per question. Divide students into small groups so that there is one question per group. Give each group of students a different color marker, and assign them a question to start with. Students discuss and write their responses on the poster paper. After three to five minutes, have the groups rotate to another question. You can have each group discuss each of the questions if you have sufficient time. You should encourage the groups to add on to and provide additional evidence to the responses that are written. Debrief each question as a whole class, providing appropriate scaffolds for your ELs.

## Debrief Circles (Also Known as Reel Activity)

For this activity, give each student an index card, and ask him or her to answer two questions (one on each side of the card). Have students count off by twos. They should form two concentric circles, with one student facing another student (e.g., number ones in the inner circle and number twos in the outer circle). Have students share their responses to one of the questions with each other. Then, have students in the inner circle move one or two students to the left. Students can then share their responses to the second question. You can have students move multiple times, each time sharing their responses and hearing other students' responses. You can also have students put away their index cards as they gain increasing confidence in speaking about the topic. If you want to up the rigor on this activity (and if the students have a high enough English proficiency level to do so), the students can write their own questions. The teacher can preview and accept the questions or send them back for edits before the questions are used. As a wrap-up to the activity, you can ask students to compare how their

responses differed from those of their peers or to share whether their responses changed based on listening to their peers.

## Each One to Teach One

In pairs, students take on the roles of teacher and student. The “teacher” teaches the student a certain concept that she or he has been working on in the class using specific sentence starters and academic vocabulary. Then, the students switch roles, and the new “teacher” has to teach a different concept (L. Kuti, personal communication, September 22, 2016).

## Role-Play

Sometimes, students can feel intimidated or strange using academic language to discuss an issue. Role-playing can be a good way to have students tackle these issues under the guise of someone else. For example, during a science unit focused on conservation, you might ask students to take on specific roles (e.g., a scientist and a businessperson) and discuss, in pairs, the pros and cons of renewable energy sources, such as wind or solar energy. Similarly, in a history course, you might ask students to take on the roles of historical figures in order to discuss a particular topic (e.g., a Patriot and a Loyalist during the American Revolution).

## World Café

Put students in groups of three to four. Give each group a topic to discuss. One person should be the designated leader. That person should take notes on the discussion on a piece of poster paper. After a set period of time, all students, except for the leader, should move to another discussion group. Students do not have to stay in the same groups. The leader provides highlights of the previous discussion to the new group. A new leader is assigned. The new group discusses the same topic and adds to the notes. In order to debrief the activity, you can hang the posters in front of the class and have students share highlights from their discussion.