

# *LISTEN*

Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance or with impressing the other, or if you are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or if you are debating whether the word being spoken is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters may have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered.

Listening . . . is a primitive act of love, in which a person gives himself to another's word, making himself accessible and vulnerable to that word.



From *Friends Journal*  
by William Stringfellow

**The Inner-Outer Circle**  
**A Way to Teach Socratic Discussion in High School English Classrooms**  
**Student Handout**

*Developed by Jim Lindsay*

**Description:**

The Inner-Outer Circle consists of one class population split in half. Approximately 13 of you will sit in the “inner” circle. For 25 minutes, the inner circle will discuss the assigned reading selection. Then, we will switch positions, the people on the outer circle will become the inner circle, and they will discuss the same reading selection with newer, refreshed viewpoints and evidence. Each student is graded on individual performance, but with the idea that the individual contributes to the whole class discussion.

**Objective:**

Through consistent Inner-Outer Circle discussions, students are forced to direct their own learning. They decide which parts of the passage to discuss and what path the discussion will follow. Some of the goals of this assignment are the following:

- to teach one another about what you find in your reading,
- to take risks rather than rely on teacher validation,
- to read and evaluate literature orally and on a complex level,
- to involve yourself completely in the reading and listening process,
- to practice finding and preparing meaningful passages from your text; and,
- to learn how to take notes effectively from listening.

**Grading:**

You are graded on a five-point scale. Level one reflects the most minor of comments. Level five is the strongest.

- 1 (below 70) = a spoken offering of usually one sentence. Here, you can also give more than a sentence that paraphrases, identifies, or **speaks “around” meaning**. This type of comment will not earn you many points, but if you participate often, you can acquire some additive points.
- 2 (70-79) = an **offering of a quotation** from the assigned reading, which tells me that you see a concrete detail. Yet, you do only that and do not go beyond the obvious to show what the meaning of the passage is. Even if your analysis is completely incorrect, you may still earn the 2 because you take a risk or add a valid point. Again, if you have already spoken a stronger comment and add a 2, you get more credit.
- 3 (80-89) = a comment that begins with **a quotation and extends into some good commentary**. Students who extend and analyze usually earn a score of 3. Also, if you broach a topic that spawns lively discussion, you earn a 3 for your ability to springboard further great thinking. Remember, though, you have to root yourself in the text with a quote and comment first!
- 4 (90-100) = an indication that you have done something even greater than the extension that would earn you a 3. Usually, an extension that earns a 4 has **seen a passage on more than one level, analyzed a literary device, or commented on how the passage is valuable to the whole piece in multiple ways**. This type of comment will explain the “how,” whereas the 3 extension would only show the “what.” Think literary devices here, and you will be on your way to earning a score of 4.
- 5 (90-100) = is the highest number on the scale, which shows how you look at the text for **deep, rich analysis, multiple literary devices, and a cross-reference**. Start with a quotation, offer the deep comment, view and show the importance of the

literary device, cross reference a second detail within the text or to another book entirely, and show the similarities or differences. For instance, if we were discussing how Ma in *The Grapes of Wrath* is easily identified as an earth mother archetype, you may make a cross reference to how Mama in *A Raisin in the Sun* is the same archetype and compare the two characters' traits and authors' treatment of the paragons.

### **Preparation:**

When you prepare for an Inner-Outer Circle discussion, your homework for the night before is to read the assignment and then return to class having highlighted and written notes about 7-10 passages from the assignment. In the event we will discuss poetry, you should highlight and take notes on 7-10 lines, couplets, or parts of stanzas. If you prepare only one or two quotations, you will not do well because it is likely that a classmate will "steal" your quotation and you will be left with a grade that does not reflect your knowledge.

### **Table Leaders:**

Each circle has a student table leader. This person will delegate who speaks and will monitor and change topics that either become overdone or forced. Also, the person should know when to ask more of a participant with statements such as "How did you figure that out?" or "Tell us more about why you see the passage in that way." The table leader is interactive. Sometimes, the teacher will pass a note to the table leader to help him or her encourage quieter students to talk and bring up topics that the circle missed. Almost always, the table leader earns a 100% for the job. This person is the one who delegates fairness.

### **The Outer Circle:**

The outer circle members do not just sit back and enjoy the ride before them. They make a list of students' names on their own paper and, using this sheet, grade their classmates as well. The outer circle members take notes as copiously as the teacher does. You will never suffer from accidentally repeating a comment from the inner circle if you are well prepared and take good notes while the discussion is taking place. You turn this sheet in at the end of the period and it becomes 10% of your grade.

### **Tips:**

- Do not be absent because the make up is harder and involves fewer people, typically at 7:30 am two days after the assigned Inner-Outer Circle. If you have morning sports or activities, it is imperative that you are in class.
- If you are shy, now is your time to work on that! You must find a way (and I am always happy to help!) to participate because you should view these days as opportunities to grow.
- Do not dominate the conversation. Balance your excellent comments with excellent listening and note-taking. You harm others' grades if you take up their time. You can assist in this way by being as succinct as possible. Blather gets belabored quickly.
- Prepare! Study with a friend if you like and plan quotes together. This way you can practice allying one another.
- Avoid relying on pre-published study notes. I know when you use them, and you may breach your school's acceptable use policy or honor code.