

WISe-IF Activities Toolbox

Activities are a way to engage your group and enliven your conversation. They're a way to pull people out of themselves and to free them to consider questions in new, more challenging, and deeper ways. Below you'll find descriptions of activities that past participants in WISe have used. Use them as a springboard for your own ideas; they're meant to help you think about what might work best in your discussion.

Metaphors

A good opening activity. Have everyone in the group write down a metaphor for something you are getting ready to discuss. For example "Education at my high school was like..." or "Wisdom is like..." Remind group members that there is no right answer and ask them to think creatively. Remind them that a metaphor does not define a word; instead it helps us understand it by evoking images and feelings. Give them a minute to come up with an answer, then write down a list of their metaphors. Try to get everyone to contribute. After you have your list, ask the group how they think any or all of the metaphors help us see the topic in a new light. Take some time to explore. For example, try to think of as many things as possible it would mean to say "Wisdom is like a light in darkness." Think about how the metaphors relate to each other: are there themes among them? or striking differences? Every time I've done this activity, I've been surprised and pleased by the creativity of the answers and how the activity opens up the discussion.

Imagery

Speaking from observations and experience in WISe, relating the topic at hand with a visual image can make the facilitation much more vivid. As the facilitator asks questions in a way that ignites the discussion, participants are asked to relate their individual ideas with an image that would best describe it. For example, when the topic of changing the education paradigm was presented in IF discussions, the group related it to an "intellectual eagle", and IF participants adorned the eagle with a graduation cap, glasses, etc to make the eagle an intellectual aura. Imagery helped draw the participants' attention, kept them engaged while making their ideas on the topic much more vivid.

Experiments

Experiments can be complicated, depending on the topic at hand. But everyone who passed the third grade knows the scientific method. If conducting an experiment for an IF facilitation, then it should be as easy as your fifth grade science fair project, if not easier. All that needs to be done is to go through the steps: observation, hypothesis, experiment, results, and conclusion. Observations: Let the group give their observations on the topic or from the class readings. The facilitator writes down the comments as everyone participates. Hypothesis: "If..., then..." statements. There can be multiple hypotheses; the facilitator should try to get one from each participant. Experiment: Come up with a creative way to test the hypotheses. This is where the facilitator's creativity comes into play. Result: The facilitator should ask the group what they saw to be the results, and then write down what they say. Conclusion: No need to write down anything else since it's already been written, unless the facilitator wants to. The facilitator should talk with the group about the overall experiment as it relates to class. The conclusion makes it easy for the facilitator to wrap up the facilitation.

Assign Characters

The facilitation consists of the facilitator and the participants in the group. Since all of the participants in the group are collegiate women, then their opinions might be similar. In order to get more outlooks on the subject at hand, the facilitator can assign each member a different role in society. For example, if the topic is “What does education mean to you?” then the facilitator could assign one person to be a kindergartener, a high school teacher, a mother who has children in school, etc. By giving each person a different identity, the facilitator will receive different perspectives in return. This will help the group see how others react to the topic, in this case education, and ultimately help them with writing their essays. Also, the facilitator should still incorporate the class readings by asking questions, such as, “Would the high school teacher agree or disagree with the Robinson video?” I did this for one of my facilitations and saw a student do this in a similar way, and it worked very effectively.

‘Get up and Get moving’ Icebreaker!

Because WISe starts so early in the morning and IFs are on Fridays, it is sometimes very difficult to engage your participants and get them excited about the topics at hand. An excellent way to get your participants up and moving is to have a hands-on Icebreaker Activity that forces each person to get up and actively participate in the discussion. For example, I have observed facilitators take a Post-It for each participant and attach them to the walls around their group’s area. Make sure to put the name of each of your participants and allow them all to choose a marker (preferably a different color per person if possible). Then this is where your creativity can really flow! Either have your participants draw a picture pertaining to that week’s topic, or create an acronym for a keyword of that week’s lessons. For example, for the ‘Happiness’ IF participants were asked “what makes you happy?”, the participants drew their families, music notes, and pets. The facilitator asked them not to speak or use words while drawing. The other facilitator wrote HAPPINESS along the side of each Post-It and had each participant write a personal acronym for what makes them happy. After each, have the participants briefly discuss what they mean by each word or picture, or have the other participants guess! After, discuss what similarities and/or differences observed between everyone’s responses. Make sure to draw ideas from your texts and discuss how they relate to participant’s ideas! Have fun!

“Perspective Swap” and “Picture Phrasing”

These are activities I’ve seen students in my WISe class do recently, and it seems like each week the different groups do something similar but put a twist on it. What I like to call the Perspective Swap activity is basically something along the lines of the IF facilitator asking the group members individually what they think about a certain topic and asking them to come write it themselves and/or just say it out loud then pass it along to someone else. This activity ensures that everyone becomes engaged and involved and has a say in the discussion. Another variation of this activity that I’ve seen recently is the facilitator will come in and start the discussion by telling everyone to write something down on a sheet of paper and pass it around which allows everyone to share their perspectives among the group before actually talking about it and getting it on the big paper.

The Picture Phrasing activity is somewhat similar to that of Perspective Swap (and the Icebreaker that Blaire mentioned above), but it differs in the way that instead of having the group members write down words, the facilitator has them draw pictures on the big note paper pertaining to a certain question that was asked or just the overall IF topic for that week. One facilitator had her group members come up and draw a picture that symbolizes what it means to be here at Wesleyan; one picture resembled money, another depicted peace, love, and happiness, and another showed a unicorn frolicking among a rainbow. So as you can imagine, these all added creativity, variation of perspectives, and some humor to the discussion to make it more engaging and intriguing. These two activities stand out to me, and I think they are great additions to any IF discussion. Adding your own spin to these and other activities mentioned by other mentors above would guarantee an interesting IF session indeed!

Word Association Game:

The word association game is one that is one of my personal favorites, I play it when I need to focus my thoughts or just relax. It is a great help when forming an argument for a paper; if you need to think in an abstract or divergent way in order to make an argument or create a solution it provides the alternative thinking that leads to innovation and creation. You play by starting out with one word, and whatever word you think of immediately after writing the previous word, you write down. As an example:

Tree - bark - dog - fur - coat - winter - cold - tissue - nose

You end up with something that is far from the original word, but you create new pathways for thinking. I showed this technique to my class a few weeks ago and to my delight they loved it. We started out with the word “Standardization” and ended up with “Tylenol.” I had several participants say after class that they really enjoyed it, and that they would have never thought of using a game like it in the IF process. Since my presentation, they have grown and expanded the idea of using different techniques within the IF process.

Hat Trick

This game is one that works especially well with a novel such as *Silver Sparrow* but it could also work with other things as well. The facilitator brings in a hat that is filled with either characters from a novel or ideas from whatever text or video is being read that week. Each participant in the group picks a character or idea from the hat. Once the characters or ideas are chosen, one of two things can be done: 1) with characters, the group could act out the character or they could even act out the idea and the rest of the group guesses or 2) each group member can explain the character or the idea’s significance. I played this game with my IF group and it ended up being one of the most fun activities that we did as a group. It gets the blood flowing, the creativity moving, and it wakes everyone up.

Doodle if you want

This activity requires that the facilitator bring in a few sheets of paper with her and pass them around. Each participant is asked to take 30 seconds to think about what she wants to draw/doodle/write in that sheet of paper that is related to the topic of discussion, without showing it to anybody else. Once this is done, one student shows her sheet to the rest of the team who in turn have to respond with the first word or few words/phrases that comes to their head when they see the picture. The facilitator writes these down

and together, the students form philosophical relationships between the topic of discussion and their underlying ideas. This has to be followed by the rest of the team. This activity is supposed to bring out originality and creativity in the students. This is supposed to be a fun activity where each person can contribute while discussing about the topic. And of course, this hopefully wakes everyone up.

Role Play with “Mix, Match and Attach”

The facilitator has small enclosed pieces of papers with different adjectives written on them. She will use this “mix, match and attach” technique to ensure active and even participation by all members of the group. The facilitator will “mix” some small enclosed sheets with words. The group members will be asked to pick an enclosed sheet of paper, read the word and try to relate or “match” the word on each of their group members. Each member will write down a name next to the adjective that they think a particular participant can best portray. This will allow the group members to assign or “attach” roles to each other. The adjectives/ words chosen will be relevant to the topic. The members will play the roles assigned to them in context of the class discussion. A similar activity was conducted during the IF facilitation, and it was certainly facilitated engaging intergroup activities.

Clay-mation

Pass out to each participant a one-ounce container of Play-Doh (ideally in different colors). Ask each person to construct a clay object relating to a word or idea given by the facilitator. Allow several minutes for this part of the activity. Then ask each participant to share her creation and tell why it relates to the prompt. The facilitator will capture their ideas and discussion about their creations on the board. Hopefully, one of the objects modeled in this activity could lead organically into one of the prompts. This activity could be used again later in the same discussion for a different prompt.

Charades

Quite a few activities in IF sessions involve groups brainstorming and generating lists of keywords and phrases. As a result, groups are normally left with quite a few pages from their flip charts posted on the wall. Near the end of a session, the facilitator can choose one “word” for a specific group member to “act out” in a game of charades. The member who guesses correctly can have the next turn acting out the next word determined by the facilitator. (Alternately, students could take turns so that more timid group members would also participate more fully.) This fun activity helps students get to know one another. In addition, it encourages students to better understand others’ interpretation of the course material and, ultimately, gain deeper insight into the readings.

Pictionary

Whereas we often have our group participants write down words or ideas that relate to our topic, ask them to draw a picture to answer the question. The group participants could do this on their own paper or go to our flip chart and draw a picture. This could be particularly helpful to international students who sometimes have a hard time expressing their ideas in words but often have a lot to contribute.

Mobile Sharing

Although we usually don't want students to have their electronic devices out during IF, there were a

couple of activities this semester which judiciously used them. After the opening activity, they put them away. One student asked her classmates to play a clip from the song they listen to most often when they are happy, then she asked what about the song added to that feeling. Other students had group members show photos related to the topics, such as to show a picture of someone who inspires you, someone who is wise, someone who makes you happy.

Backronym or Acrostic

The simplest form is to take a word and use each letter to begin a descriptive word about the thing, idea, person or place, just like you did for your mom in first grade. "SARALYN" - Smart Amazing Rigorous Altruistic Linguist Youthful Nagging. One group did this game with WESLEYAN. You could also form sentences with each instead of just one word per letter.