

MAKING MEANING

A routine for constructing collective meaning of words, ideas, concepts, or events

A word, concept, or event is identified as the focus for this routine. Groups then work through each of the following prompts, recording their responses on chart paper to make collective meaning:

- *Taking turns, each person **responds** to the chosen focus with a single word. Each person's word must be unique so that it adds to the collective meaning.*
- *Each person **adds on** to someone else's word with an additional word or phrase so as to elaborate in some way.*
- *Each person **makes a connection** between ideas that are already written on the chart paper, drawing lines and writing on those lines to illuminate the connections.*
- *Each person **records a question** that about the topic of focus based on what is emerging.*
- *Based on the group's "Making-Meaning discussion" on chart paper, each individual now writes their own **definition** of the word, topic, concept, or event being explored.*

Purpose: What kind of thinking & learning does this routine encourage?

This routine builds understanding through making connections, wondering, building explanations and eventually capturing the heart.

Application: When and where can it be used?

This routine can be used either an initial exploratory activity to activate prior knowledge and uncover learner's thinking about a topic such as: exploration, democracy, cooperation, equality, and so on. Alternatively, it can be done to culminate a unit of study or even to reflect on an event or experience.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

This routine bears some similarity to the Chalk Talk routine in that it is "a conversation on paper." However, the Making Meaning routine offers more structure to the "conversation" not only in its series of steps, but also in that one is always attending to and building off of other's responses. Another difference is that Chalk Talks tend to use a question as their focus, whereas Making Meaning typically uses a single word such as, balance, poetry, community, revolution, and so on. While a Chalk Talk is done in silence, participants may talk in the Making Meaning routine, particularly as they make connections and raise questions.

This routine works well with groups from 4-8. Place a sheet of chart paper on the table for each group to record their ideas. Each individual will need a marker. Announce the topic or word being explored. Explain that the group will be making collective meaning of this word together by working in responding to five different prompts. Since the group is working together to build meaning, they will be responding one at a time so that their contribution adds to the "conversation" rather than duplicates what others have written. The first time through it might be easiest if students stand in a circle around the chart paper and work clockwise around the group as they respond to each prompt.

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