Minnesota Humanities Center

Jigsaw

About

Jigsaw is a structured discussion routine where students become experts on one piece of content and then teach it to their peers. It gives students multiple opportunities to explain their thinking, listen to others, and synthesize across perspectives. By engaging in both small-group expertise and repeated peer teaching, students build deeper understanding of complex, multi-part topics.

Repeatable Routines

Routine 1: Classic Jigsaw

Approximate Time: 25–35 minutes

Students become experts on one section of content and then teach it to peers in mixed groups. This structure ensures that all students engage with multiple parts of the content and work collaboratively to build a complete understanding.

Best Used When:

- Working with multi-part content
- Supporting collaborative synthesis and discussion
- Building accountability within group learning

Set Up: Divide content into 4–6 sections and assign students to Expert Groups. Assign each Expert Group one section of content to study. Provide guiding questions or organizers to support understanding and note-taking.

Plan for students to move into mixed groups with one representative from each Expert Group.

Teacher establishes norms:

- “Be prepared to teach your section to others.”
- “Listen actively and contribute to group understanding.”
- “Use evidence to support your ideas.”

Activity: Within Expert Groups, students analyze their assigned section of content. They work toward a shared understanding, identify key ideas and evidence, and prepare to teach their section to peers.

Students move into Mixed Groups containing one representative from each Expert Group. Each student teaches their section of content while others listen, ask questions, and take notes. The teacher circulates to support understanding and prompt deep thinking.

Mixed groups complete a task that requires combining their expertise, such as answering a new prompt, identifying connections across sections, or developing a shared explanation.

Routine 2: Rotating Conversations

Approximate Time: 30–45 minutes

Students develop expertise in one section of content and then teach it through multiple structured partner conversations. Through repeated explanation and attentive listening, students deepen their understanding and connect ideas across conversations.

Best Used When:

- Building fluency in explaining ideas
- Ensuring all students have multiple opportunities to speak and listen
- Encouraging active listening and questioning
- Supporting synthesis through repeated interaction

Set Up: Divide content into 4–6 sections and assign students to Expert Groups. Assign each Expert Group one section of content to study. Provide guiding questions or organizers to support analysis and note-taking.

Arrange two concentric circles of chairs so that each student in the inner circle faces a partner in the outer circle.

Teacher establishes norms:

- “Be prepared to clearly explain your section multiple times.”
- “Listen actively and ask questions to deepen understanding.”
- “Take notes on what you learn from each partner.”

Activity: Students meet in Expert Groups to read, analyze, and develop a clear explanation of their assigned section using the guiding questions or organizers to prepare to teach their content.

Split each Expert Group in half so students are distributed across both circles. Students engage in short, timed partner conversations in which they repeatedly explain their assigned section and listen to others explain theirs. Use a timer to maintain pacing. Each round is approximately 3–6 minutes and is structured as follows:

- Inner circle students teach for 1–2 minutes while outer circle partners listen and take notes.
- Outer circle students teach for 1–2 minutes while inner circle partners listen and take notes.
- Partners spend 1–2 minutes commenting on what they heard and asking and answering questions.

At the end of each round, students in the outer circle move one seat to the right while the inner circle remains stationary. Repeat rounds until students have engaged with multiple partners or time runs out.

Students participate in a whole-class discussion to synthesize learning, identify themes, and address questions that emerged during conversations.

Tips for Implementation

- **Use a visible timer.** Display time limits for sharing and discussion so all students have opportunities to participate.
- **Model respectful listening and questioning.** Demonstrate active listening and constructive questioning to guide productive discussion.
- **Clarify sharing order.** Explain who shares first and second to reduce confusion and keep rotations smooth.