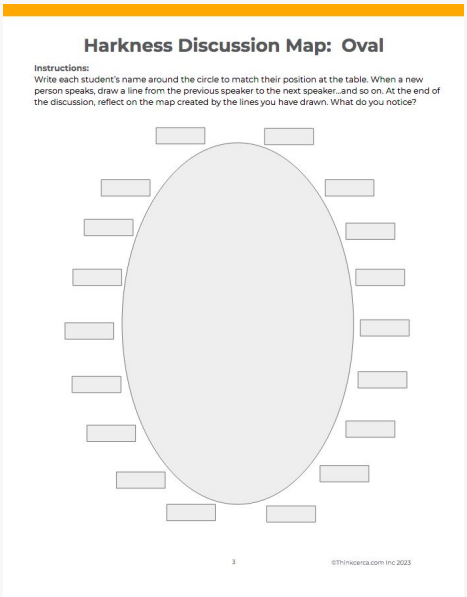

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Harkness Discussion

A method for implementing student-led class discussion that incorporates student-formulated questions and responses.

Suggested time: 30-40 minutes

Rationale/Research Base

The Harkness Discussion model emphasizes student-led learning, which empowers students and leads to deeper discussion and higher college-readiness scores.

Optimal Application Notes:

For this model to be effective, the teacher should not guide students towards a desired answer. Instead, the teacher should be a participant or an observer in an open-ended discussion.

Before:

- Have students read a set of texts and prepare notes, talking points, questions, and ideas for discussion.
- Place chairs or desks in a circle, oval, or U shape ensuring eye contact among all students.
- Invite students to join the Harkness discussion.
- Introduce students to discussion expectations, such as looking at the person speaking, staying engaged, and asking clarifying questions.
- Give students examples of what active participation looks like in a Harkness discussion (e.g. ask a question, present evidence from the text).
- Remind them of the expectations for all to participate and the goals of the conversation to reflect and develop new ideas together.
- Complete the oval map or the tracking table with student names

During:

- Begin by posing open-ended questions about the reading or topic and inviting students to respond and discuss.
- Examples of open-ended questions:
  - *What function did today's readings provide?*
  - *What do you think about ___?*
  - *What conclusion do you draw from ___?*
  - *What would you do if ___?*
  - *Have you ever had an experience where ___?*
- Teacher completes the map or the table as the discussion unfolds.

Student Tasks:

- Complete reading and take notes
- Come to discussion prepared
- Engage in discussion with class
- Reflect on discussion afterward

Online ThinkCERCA Modules:

- ThinkCERCA provides Pause and Reflect questions with core readings and guiding questions for all texts.
- Student Guides in ThinkCERCA platform provide graphic organizers for students to record reading notes and discussion points.
- ThinkCERCA provides sentence frames for writing about and discussing larger texts.

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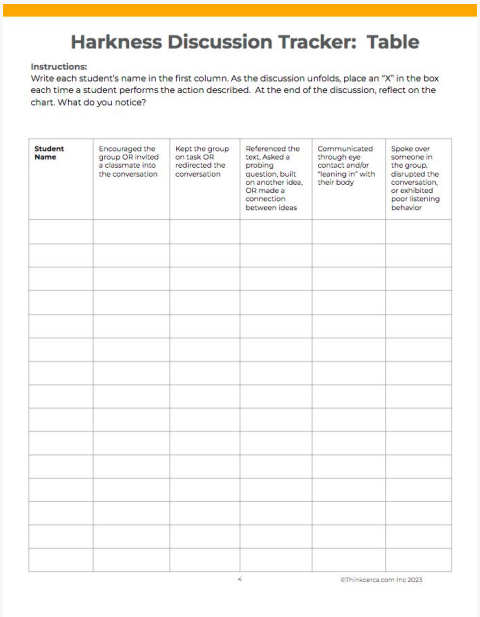

Harkness Discussion Tracker: Table

Instructions:
Write each student's name in the first column. As the discussion unfolds, place an "X" in the box each time a student performs the action described. At the end of the discussion, reflect on the chart. What do you notice?

Student Name	Encouraged the group OR invited a classmate into the conversation	Kept the group on task OR redirected the conversation	Referenced the text, Asked a probing question, built on another idea, OR made a connection between ideas	Communicated through eye contact and/or "leaning in" with their body	Spoke over someone in the group, disrupted the conversation, or exhibited poor listening behavior

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During, continued:

- Once the class is accustomed to this model, the teacher may guide students to act as facilitators, posing questions and using the map or table to track peers' engagement.
- Dividing into smaller student-led groups to discuss allows the teacher to float, monitor, clarify, and observe student learning.
- After some practice, teachers could consider placing students in pairs and designating each member of the pair as an A or B. Then, have a first-round discussion with all As participating while the Bs track their partners' participation. After 15 to 20 minutes, switch roles.

After:

- Students reflect on the ideas generated in their discussion, including those they found interesting and questions they want to explore further as a result.
- If students were facilitators/trackers they could also reflect on and discuss their observations on the map or table they completed.

Scaffolds & Supports:

- Provide opportunities for students to record parts of the discussion to reference later.
- Allow use of digital copies for students to type or use speech-to-text for reading and discussion notes.
- Encourage students to use translators and/or dictionaries as needed to support comprehension.

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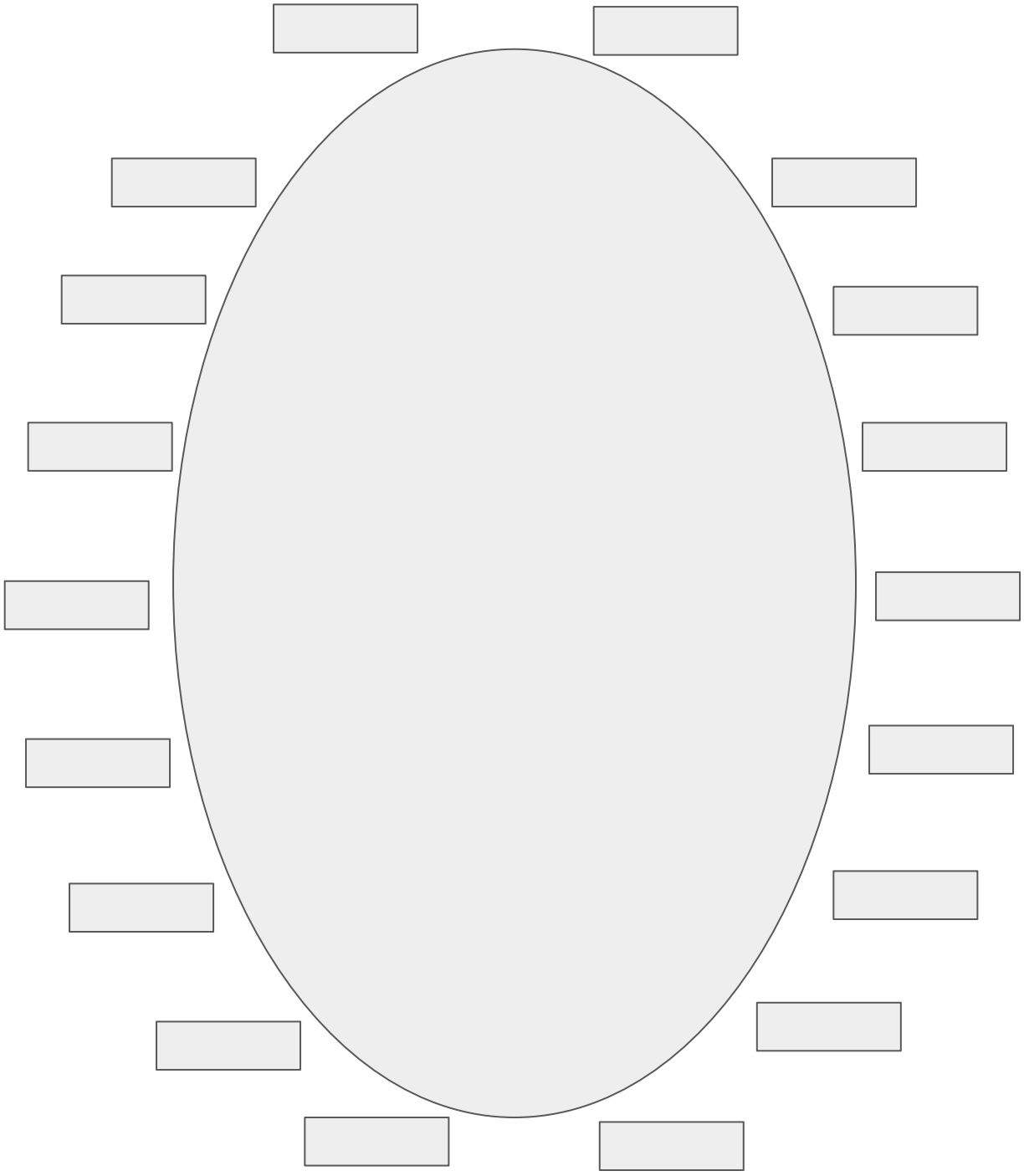
Harkness Discussion Map: Oval

Instructions:
Write each student's name around the circle to match their position at the table. When a new person speaks, draw a line from the previous speaker to the next speaker...and so on. At the end of the discussion, reflect on the map created by the lines you have drawn. What do you notice?



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