

## **Havruta Skills/Practices Final Assessment: Teacher Reflections on Student Work**

This assignment was designed to assess what students think a great discussion would look like. I decided that they should write about content areas with which they were already familiar; at the time of this assignment, we were studying whales (specifically, the differences between toothed and baleen whales) and fractions. Additionally, I wanted to see how the havruta practices we had been using during values classes would translate to their general studies content areas. This assignment both demonstrates and encourages a clear connection between what we do during havruta time and discussions we have during any other class period; ideally, my students will apply what they know about good discussion to all conversations they have.

I was interested in seeing how they would specifically represent active listening and respectful challenging, as well as other skills for working together that I had taught them. The students had not created comics in the class previously, so I was curious how their ideas would translate into this format. Below are my reflections on Hannah, Sophia and Eli's comics.

*Hannah:*

The student demonstrates understanding of:

- One person speaks at a time.
- The partner responds to what his/her partner says.
- When partners disagree they say why (“I disagree because I know  $3/12 = 1/4$ ”).
- Partners check ideas and/or challenge their own idea to see if it’s right. (Notice the fraction drawing in frame 4. Here the student demonstrates that you have to show evidence to prove a point.)
- Partners listen to ideas they disagree with (frames 4 and 5).
- At some point partners must come to a decision about what to put down on paper in order to hand in their work.
- Partners face one another. (Notice how the partners are sitting facing one another in profile.)

*Sophia:*

The student demonstrates understanding of:

- Students make eye contact when having a discussion (notice the different eyes).
- Students listen to one another (notice that when one partner is speaking, the other partner's ears are larger).
- Partners disagree ("I disagree because they eat little fish").
- Partners show they are listening and understand. (In frame 5, the partner says, "Oh now I see what you mean" .)
- Partners push each other to make sure their ideas are the best they can be (Frame 6: "Do you think this is good enough?").

*Eli:*

The student demonstrates understanding of:

- One person speaks at a time. (Notice in frame 4 how the student labeled the talking 1 and 2, which indicates that one person speaks and the other listens so there's no interrupting.)
- Partners wonder before answering. (Notice in frames 1 and 2 there is "hmmm" and a thought bubble.)
- Students take ownership of their own ideas. (In frame 2 it says, "I think...")
- When partners disagree, they say why. ("I disagree because if baleen whales eat smaller whales; how are they bigger than toothed whales?")
- Partners listen to ideas they disagree with (frame 3).
- Partners push each other to make sure their ideas are the best they can be. (In frame 6, the student writes, "Hold your horses!" to imply that before they write down the answer they should consider a different or better answer.)
- A group effort should be made to decide what to write down (frames 7 and 8).

*Common challenges I see these students representing:*

- What happens after you challenge someone's idea? How do two people continue to discuss ideas back and forth to clarify and refine?
- How to ask questions to expand an idea
- How to continue to improve on an existing idea

(Note: I observe these challenges manifested in actual havruta time.)

Students understand that they can challenge someone's idea when they disagree, and they can also challenge their own ideas to help refine them. However, they are still working on how to discuss each other's perspectives and continue to have a back-and-forth conversation about an idea. This skill requires students to sustain conversation on one topic for an extended period of time. I have found that with the help of a facilitator, they can sustain it much longer. Havruta is a place where they can begin these conversations and practice listening to and challenging ideas, but there is still a need to bring the discussion that occurs in small groups or pairs back to the whole class to clarify misunderstandings, build off one another's ideas, and continue to push each other's thinking in a structured and supportive environment.

It is interesting that in all three comics, the students drew pictures of themselves handing in their work. In one comic, the student even drew the teacher. This makes me wonder about for whom they think they are doing their work. Do they take pride in their work, understand that it is part of their learning process and want to share it with others or do they think they are doing it simply for the sake of handing in to a teacher. I spend time in my class explaining to my students why I ask them to do particular work in *havruta*. These comics remind me that students can have many different understandings of the work teachers ask them to do and that it's important to keep talking with students about the purpose of their work all through the school year.