

EXAMPLES OF SMALL GROUP TASKS

EXAMPLE FROM A SHAKESPEARE COURSE

Background: When the ghost tells Hamlet "If thou didst ever thy dear father love / Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder," Hamlet replies:

Haste me to know 't [the name of the murderer] that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.29-31)

Why doesn't Hamlet just swoop in and kill Claudius? What causes Hamlet to delay?

Group task: Develop at least three plausible theories why Hamlet delays. Recorders, begin your formal presentation with the following sentence: "Our group has come up with three separate theories about the cause of Hamlet's delay." Justify each theory with effective argumentation and textual support.

EXAMPLE FROM A PUBLIC ISSUES RESEARCH SEMINAR

Background: So far we have been reading articles on biotech agriculture and genetically modified foods. As we have seen, opponents of GM foods are often strongly supportive of organic farming. Yet Stephen Milloy, a scholar with the Cato Institute, claims that organic foods are a "USDA-approved scam." Organic labeling, he claims, is a "marketing tool" for promoting boutique foods to an upscale, new-age market. Organic foods, he says, should be labeled "rip off." [Source: Steven Milloy, "Organic Food Seasoned With Fear." <http://www.cato.org/dailys/07-07-01.html>.

Small group task: Based on the research you have done so far, on your own life experiences, and on any other knowledge you bring to this issue, what is your view of organic farming?

Divide your discussion into three segments (recorders, keep track of the time)

1. Make a bulleted list of the chief arguments used to support organic farming
2. Identify possible weaknesses in the pro-organic farming arguments
3. Reach consensus on where your group stands. Do you agree with Milloy or not that the organic food movement is a rip-off and a scam? (If you can't reach consensus, then a second person can give a minority report)

Recorders: At the plenary session, present your group's list of the arguments for and against organic farming. Then explain where your group currently stands on this issue and why.

TOTAL SMALL GROUP TIME: 40 MINUTES

Source: Bean, J. C. (2002, October 16). Low cost writing assignments: How to use writing to enhance learning and critical thinking without increasing the teacher's burden. Presentation

given at Kansas State University as a Faculty Swap Session. (*Permission to post was granted by the author*).