



First Day of Class Quotes

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Purpose: To make the first day of class a learning experience. This exercise has several specific goals: (1) encouraging students to think of questions about the course content; (2) enabling students to hold small group discussions in a meaningful way; (3) allowing the professor to respond to students' comments about course content without dominating; (4) helping the professor assess the knowledge of students without testing them, so that course content can be set at an appropriate level.

Directions: Have each student pick a slip of paper with a quotation from one of the assigned readings for the semester. To prepare for this exercise, you will need to select key or interesting sentences or passages from the readings. You may choose whether to include the author or not.

Have students meet in small groups, read their quotes aloud, and then have everyone in the group ask questions about the meaning of the quote. Such questions might include: Why would someone have said that? Was there a relevant historical context? What was the reaction of the public when such a statement was made?

After 15-20 minutes, ask students to report back to the class the quotes and questions that were of most interest to them. Reporting back can take as much time as you want. You might also encourage others in the class to provide some of the answers.

While you the professor could have easily answered students' questions, taking on the role of facilitator instead of expert helps you support the main intention of the exercise, which is to encourage students to become engaged learners. The exercise sets the tone that the course is about inquiry and asking questions, that students have a role in that process, and that we are a learning community. You can then note that their questions will be addressed during the semester, further engaging them with course content.