

“Discovery” Activity

This activity, designed for all ages, is taken from Bigelow’s article “Discovering Columbus: Re-reading the Past” in RTC (pp. 17-21). See the article for a more detailed discussion of activity.

Preparation

Ask a student ahead of time if you can use his backpack, purse, desk, etc. for a demonstration. Be sure to let him know that he must keep it a secret for it to work.

Process

At the beginning of class, ‘steal’ the student’s purse, backpack etc. Announce that it is yours because you have it, you found it. A few, if not all, of the students will protest, saying they saw you take it. Reiterate that it is yours, you have it in your hands, that makes it yours. Begin going through the things pointing out that all of these items are yours. Some students will likely continue to protest that it is not yours. Ask them “How do you know that this isn’t mine?” Continue with questions like: “If we had a test on the contents of the purse, who would do better, student or I?” “Whose labor earned the money that bought the things in the purse, mine or student?” These are obvious questions with obvious answers.

Ask one last question: “What if I said I discovered this purse, then would it be mine?” Students will likely respond no, so follow up with “So, why do we say that Columbus discovered America?” This activity could continue into a discussion of how to define “discovery” or a more explicit means of vocabulary instruction. For a more discussion-based lesson, (probably more appropriate for upper elementary grades) as a class create a definition that works for everyone and keep it posted in the room. Use the following questions to guide the discussion: Does discovery mean to find? If you discover something, does it mean that no one else has ever found/seen it? Or does it mean that it is new to you? Is there any relationship between discovery and ownership?

You could also segue way to a more systematic form of vocabulary instruction. The following is based upon a vocabulary instruction strategy used in Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD). It could be used here, or any other time that fits appropriately with your unit. It can be used with the word “discovery” and for any other word that is central to your unit. Pictures have been provided to offer a visual of what is being described for those not familiar with GLAD instruction. For more information about GLAD instruction and strategies, visit the Project G.L.A.D. website: <http://www.projectglad.com/>.