

Jigsaw – Teaching Strategy

Quick Overview

Jigsaw is a collaborative reading strategy that breaks a longer text or text set into smaller sections. Students first work in “expert groups” to closely read and understand one assigned section, then move into mixed “home groups” where each member teaches their portion of the text. Through this process, students rely on one another’s expertise to construct a full understanding of the text while practicing teamwork, summarizing, and academic discussion.

Skill Objective

Students will...

- Read and analyze a complex text section independently and collaboratively.
- Summarize key ideas and details from an assigned portion of a text.
- Synthesize information from multiple sections into a cohesive understanding of a text.

Content Objective

Students will...

- Explain key ideas, events, or arguments presented across the full text or text set.
- Use evidence from multiple sections of a text to support explanations.
- Demonstrate understanding of how individual sections contribute to the text’s overall meaning.

Civics Skills Connection

Disciplinary Literacy:

- **Information literacy:** Students identify, find, evaluate, and use information from various sources.
- **Media literacy:** Students decode, analyze, and evaluate print and digital media.
- **Historical source literacy:** Students use a variety of maps, documents, and other historical sources to interpret and answer questions about the past and present.

Collaborative/Dialogic Learning:

- **Informed civic engagement:** Students share their learning through an experiential activity that allows for the collaborative practice of the habits of citizenship.
- **Narrative development:** Students develop proficiency in a topic or issue by reading and crafting narratives that engage and build connections between the topic, the learner, and the classroom community.

Prep ahead

This strategy works best with students who can read the selected text independently and confidently. Select a longer text or text set that can be meaningfully divided into 3–5 sections, with each section representing a complete idea or argument.

- Divide the text so each section is manageable for students yet still rich enough for discussion.
- Prepare individual student copies of:
 - each section of the text (students receive only their assigned section)
 - a set of text-dependent questions specific to that section
- Prepare one or more copies for each home group of a separate set of questions that require understanding of the entire text or text set.

Strategy Steps

1. Divide students into groups based on the number of text sections prepared.
2. Students with the same section form **expert groups**.
3. Each student receives:
 - a copy of their assigned section of the text
 - the questions aligned to that section
4. In expert groups, students read their section independently or collaboratively and discuss responses to their section-specific questions.
5. Students reorganize into **home groups**, with at least one representative from each expert group.
6. Each home group receives one or more copies of the questions that connect to the full text or text set.
7. Students take turns teaching their section to the home group, sharing:
 - a summary of key ideas
 - important details or takeaways
8. Home groups use the full text questions to synthesize information from all sections and demonstrate understanding of the complete text or text set.

Customizations

- **Option 1: Move it**
 - Post section summaries around the room after expert group work. Students rotate, adding questions or connections before returning to home groups.
- **Option 2: Assess it**
 - Collect individual expert group responses and/or home group synthesis answers. Assess students on accuracy of understanding, use of evidence, and clarity of explanation rather than completion alone.

This option works well when the jigsaw is preparing students for a larger assessment or writing task.

- **Option 2: Share it**
 - After home group discussions, students share summaries or key takeaways with the whole class. The teacher charts similarities and differences across groups to reinforce how individual sections contribute to a shared understanding of the text.
- **Option 3: Extend it**
 - Ask students to apply what they learned from the full text to a new question, scenario, or contemporary issue. This may include a short writing prompt, discussion, or comparison to another source.
- **Option 4: Support it**
 - Provide sentence starters, graphic organizers, or guided notes for expert groups, especially useful for emerging readers or when working with especially complex texts. Supports can be removed over time as students become more confident with the strategy.
- **Option 5: Flip it**
 - After completing one round of jigsaw, reassign students to new expert groups with a second, related text. Students compare how ideas overlap or differ across texts, deepening synthesis and transfer. Students then move to home groups with more nuance to their understanding of each text in the set.