



BECOMING HOMELESS VR & DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

OVERVIEW

Students will go through the experience on homelessness. The purpose is to create a more empathetic view to the circumstances that result in being homeless. This is a fantastic springboard to class discussions and writing assignments meant for them to challenge preconceived notions.

MATERIALS

- Oculus Rift or Rift S
- Oculus Touch controllers

CREDITS

www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/

www.grinnell-k12.org

SYNOPSIS

“Becoming Homeless” is a thought-provoking experience meant to challenge our preconceived notions of homeless people and the circumstances that led to it. The experience places the user in a first-person situation where they lose their job, fall behind on bills, and evicted from their home. This begins their life on the streets where they ride public transportation. Here they and see how people react to them and hear comments made.

We understand this topic may hit hard on some students. Statistics show there is a good chance that at least one student in every class has experience some level of homelessness. With that in mind, some discussions and sharing personal experience may be difficult for some.

TIMELINE

This activity is designed to take be completed in two-45 minute sessions. The first day, or more if needed, is for students to get through the VR experience. Day 2 is used for classroom discussion time or an empathetic writing prompt.



DISCUSSION FORMAT SUGGESTIONS

Concentric Circles

a.k.a. Speed Dating

Basic Structure: Students form two circles, one inside circle and one outside circle. Each student on the inside is paired with a student on the outside; they face each other. The teacher poses a question to the whole group and pairs discuss their responses with each other. Then the teacher signals students to rotate: Students on the outside circle move one space to the right so they are standing in front of a new person (or sitting, as they are in the video). Now the teacher poses a new question, and the process is repeated.

Variations: Instead of two circles, students could also form two straight lines facing one another. Instead of “rotating” to switch partners, one line just slides over one spot, and the leftover person on the end comes around to the beginning of the line. Some teachers use this strategy to have students teach one piece of content to their fellow students, making it less of a discussion strategy and more of a peer teaching format. In fact, many of these protocols could be used for peer teaching as well.

Hot Seat

Before the discussion: Review with students the essential elements to good question formation. Encourage them to avoid yes/no questions or ones that have an obvious answer. Have them write 2 or 3 open-ended questions on a piece of paper to be used during the discussion.

Basic Structure: One student assumes the role of a book character, significant figure in history, or concept (such as a tornado, an animal, or the *Titanic*). Sitting in front of the rest of the class, the student responds to classmates’ questions while staying in character in that role.

Variations: Give more students the opportunity to be in the hot seat while increasing everyone’s participation by having students do hot seat discussions in small groups, where one person per group acts as the “character” and three or four others ask them questions. In another variation, several students could form a panel of different characters, taking questions from the class all together and interacting with one another like guests on a TV talk show.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did the experience cause you to think differently about homelessness?
- How does your current feeling about homelessness compare and contrast to your previous views about homelessness?
- Describe the emotions you felt on the bus listening to other people talk.
- Can you relate a personal experience you have had with a homeless person to the ones you experienced in the VR app?
- What is the “big idea” of the app?
- Describe what daily life would be like from the perspective of a homeless person.

