



TTV: Touchstones Launches Video Webpage

By Sharon Thomas, Director of K-12 and Family Engagement Programs

“You teach students how to have civil discourse? What does that even look like?” We’ve heard that question many times from people new to Touchstones, and now seeing the process in action is only a click away. Touchstones is delighted to announce our new webpage, [What Touchstones Looks Like](#), on our website, [touchstones.org](#).

The webpage is an ongoing work in progress as we increasingly obtain video from our various programs. We’ve organized it around the [6 steps of a Touchstones lesson plan](#) will continue adding new content so all our programs are represented:

1. The Ground Rules
2. Read the Text
3. Individual Work
4. Small Group Work
5. Whole Group Discussion
6. Evaluation

We have additional pages dedicated to video footage from specific Touchstones programs:

- [K-12 Programs](#)
- [Higher Ed Programs](#)

- [Community Programs](#)
- [Executive Programs](#)

We hope these short clips help people have a better sense of how Touchstones works—as a practice-based method that is centered in human interaction and reciprocal teaching and learning. While every Touchstones program follows the same method and yields similar and replicable outcomes, we design our curricular content for distinct learning contexts.

Some of our video footage was shot just days ago, but other video (such as that from the [Maryland House of Corrections](#)) is more than 30 years old. These real-life videos of Touchstones programs are captured in ways that reflect the actual settings. They are not professionally filmed, and you should expect varying levels of picture and sound quality.

NEW BLOG:

The Power of Questions: Gauging Reading versus Engaging Discussion



*By Sharon Thomas
Director of K-12 and Family Engagement Programs*

In a world often focused on “getting answers,” Touchstones® focuses more on asking questions, questions that support the group in building community and collaboration. Questions set the tone or, as the young say, vibes for a discussion. Depending on who the discussion leader(s) is, questions also set agendas. Will the focus of the discussion be set by one person, or will that power be shared by the group? At Touchstones, we focus a great deal in professional development on formulating opening and follow up questions because they are so important in shaping the entire interaction.

The Importance of Questions

Touchstones works to help students engage more fully with each other to become better thinkers, collaborators, and leaders. The skills that Touchstones teaches directly are speaking and listening skills: how to have civil discourse, how to listen, how to create safe environments where all voices are valued, and how to speak intentionally—to use one’s voice in ways that purposefully advance the group’s shared efforts. Because Touchstones involves a text as the “touchstone” for the discussion, educators often mistake Touchstones for a reading lesson.

A key element of Touchstones lessons is that they are not reading lessons. In a reading comprehension lesson, teachers focus their questioning to ensure that students understand everything about a passage that the teacher wants them to understand. Reading lessons are appropriately teacher-directed. When deciding on questions for a reading lesson, teachers ask themselves “What are the most important things that students need to know or understand about the content in the text?” and draft questions accordingly.

In Touchstones, our main focus is getting students to begin their collaboration, to engage them so deeply with each other that even normally reticent students may be eager to speak. A Touchstones teacher asks themselves “What topic related (directly or indirectly) to this text will students have experience with? And how will those lived experiences help them connect with each other?” That’s a very different focus than that for a reading lesson. Reading teachers want answers; Touchstones teachers want exploratory discussion.

That difference has implications for engagement in discussion as well...***continue reading the blog by clicking below.***

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