

ACTIVITY: Messages in a Bottle

TIME: 10-15 minutes

DESIGNED FOR: Small groups

NEEDS: Quotes/excerpts snippets in jar; paper; pen; framing questions for reflection

Description: This exercise is inspired by [Pierre Levy's notion of collective intelligence](#): We are all experts and apprentices to one another. Instead of conveying information/argument via presentation, participants are an empowered part of the process. This exercise enables participants, who possess their own experience of the subject, to share their powerful observations, interpretations, and insights — first individually by quietly considering a quotation or short excerpt from experts on the subject, then through interaction in pairs and/or small groups, and finally through small groups reporting back to the full group for larger discussion.

Setup: Form small groups of up to 8 people at tables or sitting in circles. Participants need pen/pencil. Place on each table a **jar with quotations and excerpts** typed on snippets of paper.

Share with each participant a **paper with 2 questions you would like them to answer/consider as they interact with the snippets *and* one another.** (Alternatively, give them blank paper with the questions written on whiteboard.) These questions should be [framing questions](#) for reflection and story sharing. Here are ideas for questions to consider, gleaned from convening past story circles and facilitating [text-to-text/text-to-self/text-to-world](#) discussions:

- What word/phrase stood out to me? What is my thinking or feeling response to this quote/passage? Or what is my physical reaction to this quote/passage?
- What ideas reflected in this quote/passage are similar to other books I have read or songs you have heard? How do the ideas reflected in this quote/passage relate to my life or experiences? How do the ideas reflected in this quote/passage relate to our community – past, present, future?

The snippets: Type up a spectrum of quotations or short excerpts from practitioners/thought leaders on discussion topic. Choose to offer the same number of snippets as people at each table or have extras. The snippets can be the same at every table or different at each one.

Instructions:

1. Ask everyone to get ready to spend some time thinking deeply and discussing in small groups. Participants need pen/pencil.
2. Ask everyone to pull a snippet from the mason jar on their table, read it silently, and then answer the 2 questions on the paper in front of them. Participants then share in their reflections with their small groups. (Participants can share in pairs, then with their small group, or with their small group only.)
3. Each group then reports to the larger group for full group conversation. During the full group's sharing out of ideas/observations/insights/examples, record them (digitally or on whiteboard, easel pad).
4. Conclude with any points they did not touch upon, then summarize with wrap-up reflection.