



Small Groups

In Brief

Students form “tables” of 2–4 to exchange a wide range of ideas.



Skills Practiced

Reasoning
Staying focused
Voicing an opinion



Time Frame

7–10 minutes



Materials

None



Variation

Use this activity to build community by discussing favorites, such as books, movies, or hobbies.

Maître d'

HOW TO DO IT

- 1. Name the learning goal.** For example: “You’re going to form different table sizes [standing groups] to share ideas about our unit on healthy living.”
- 2. Remind students about the expectations** for forming new table groups, emphasizing the importance of being inclusive, friendly, and respectful: “What will you do to make sure everyone is included?” (If needed, model how to move about the room safely.)
- 3. Call out a grouping, starting with “Table for two.”** Students quickly form pairs of their own choosing (with one table of three, if needed).
- 4. Ask a question to focus the discussion:** “How might you increase your weekly physical activity?” Give students 1–2 minutes to share (with a 15-second warning). Reinforce positive behavior: “I heard a lot of encouraging words when people got stuck on an idea to share.”
- 5. Call out “Table for three,” have students form new groups,** and ask the same question or a new one. After groups have discussed this question, call out “Table for four.” Repeat as time allows, continuing to vary the table numbers.
- 6. To extend the learning,** bring everyone back together and ask a few volunteers to share highlights from one of their conversations.

Learning Goal Examples

English Language Arts

“How are the book and movie versions of Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* different? Alike? Which did you like better, and why?”

Math

“What are some ways you use fractions in real life? How are fractions and decimals alike? Which is easier to use, and why?”

Maître d' in Action

A 6th grade art teacher models various strategies for applying different glazes to a piece of pottery and shows the results of each method after firing in a kiln. He uses Maître d' to give students opportunities to discuss what they noticed in his demonstrations. Before students begin, the teacher gives clear directions to set them up for success.

First he names the learning goal and explains roles and responsibilities: “You’re going to form different standing groups to discuss what you noticed about each glazing method. Everyone is expected to share ideas and listen to everyone else’s ideas. Remember our rule ‘Be respectful, kind, and inclusive’ when forming new groups.”

Because he’s noticed that students often struggle with transitions, he makes a point to explain how these will work for this activity: “For each round, I’ll pose a question about my demonstration. You’ll have two minutes to discuss it with your group. I’ll give a 30-second warning to wrap up your conversations. Then I’ll call out another table number and you’ll form new groups.”

After responding to a few clarifying questions, the teacher starts the activity: “Table for two! ... What did you notice about the brush-on method I used?”

After several rounds of “table” discussions, the teacher ends the activity. Students use the new understanding gained from their discussions in planning how to glaze their own pottery pieces.

Learning Goal Examples

Science

“In what ways might you conserve water at home? At school? What role can government play in protecting our water supplies?”

Social Studies

“How is a totalitarian society different from a democratic society? How are they alike? How important is a written constitution for protecting people’s freedoms?”