

Fish Bowl Activity

To help students understand the statistics in the article, "25th Anniversary Mark Elusive for Many Couples," make copies of the graphic "Majority Not Having Silver Anniversaries" (found online at <http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2007/09/20/us/20marriagegraphic.ready.html>) or project it on a classroom wall or screen. Briefly review current divorce patterns.

Then, quickly poll the class to find out the answers to these two questions: "Why do people split up? Why do people stay together?" List the most popular answers on the board. Allow students time to briefly comment on the responses.

Explain to the class that they will be participating in a "fishbowl" discussion about marriage and the recent findings of the marriage survey conducted by the Census Bureau. First, ask students to number off one to five, and then keep a list on the board of all "1's," "2's," "3's," "4's," and "5's." Ask all "1's" to sit facing one another in the middle of a circle created by the rest of the students. The students in the center are the only ones allowed to speak. If a student from the outer circle wants to add to the discussion, he or she moves to the middle of the circle, taps a participant to indicate that he or she should resume a place in the outer circle, and takes that student's place as the new person in the discussion. After discussing answers to the first statement, switch the students in the center to all "2's," and allow the same fishbowl procedure to occur. Be sure to switch topics enough times so that all students have the opportunity to be in the center of the discussion at least once. Explain that students will be completing a series of statements and discussing the answers. Statements to pose to students include (written on the board prior to class):

- "The difference between people who are married today and people who were married 20 years ago is _____.
- Longer relationships usually mean more _____.
- Divorce rates are high for young couples because _____.
- Individualized technology such as cell phones, DVRs, MP3 players, social networking Web sites, etc. affects people's relationships with others in that _____.
- Marriage may be more of a "want" than a "need" in our society today because _____.
- Religion affects many people's views about marriage because _____.
- The ingredients for a good marriage are _____."

During the last five minutes of class, ask and discuss the following questions: "What do you think is good/positive about marriage? What do you think is bad/negative about marriage?"

Further Questions for Discussion:

- What do you think is the best reason to marry someone? The worst? Explain your answers.
- How is a marriage like a business?
- Do you think the divorce rates cited in the article have any impact on society at large? Why and how?
- Do you think the institution of marriage will someday cease to exist? Why or why not, and if so, when?
- Aside from marriage, what are some other examples of partnership?