VoiceThread in Action

One of the most popular tools for asynchronous conversations is VoiceThread, a group audio blog that allows users to add text, audio, and video comments to slides containing a wide range of multimedia content. To see what VoiceThread can look like in action, spend a few minutes exploring the following conversations, which were all created by a sixth-grade language arts teacher extending traditional Socratic circles beyond the classroom.

Genocide in Darfur

http://ed.voicethread.com/share/62276

In the spring of 2007, a group of middle grade students in Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina joined together to raise attention about the genocide occurring in Darfur—a region of the African nation of Sudan. Along with blog entries and wikis designed to explain genocide to their peers, these students wrestled with the world's responsibility to help challenged nations in this VoiceThread discussion, which used political cartoons to start provocative strands of conversation.

Why Do People Hate?

http://ed.voicethread.com/share/88781

In the fall of 2008, two language arts teachers—one working with sixth graders and the other working with eighth graders—brought their students together for a Socratic circle focused on the concept of hate. For the sixth graders, this conversation was an extension of their study of the Holocaust. For the eighth graders, this conversation was an extension of their studies around the theme of justice and injustice. This VoiceThread gave both groups of students the opportunity to interact with one another before and after the traditional Socratic circle was held at school.

Learning About Adaptation and Mutation

http://ed.voicethread.com/share/518424

In the spring of 2009, a sixth-grade science teacher had his students use Flip Video camcorders to create short papercraft videos designed to introduce the concepts of natural selection, adaptation, and mutation to their peers. Then, he uploaded each group's final product to VoiceThread and asked classmates to provide one another with feedback about the overall quality of the videos produced. Doing so gave students the opportunity to practice giving and receiving constructive criticism.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there evidence of meaningful conversation between students in these VoiceThread samples? What was surprising about the conversations that developed here? Were you impressed by anything that you saw, or is this the kind of work that you would expect from students engaged in asynchronous conversations around school-based topics?

2. What weaknesses do you see in the conversations that developed between students in these VoiceThread samples? What conversation skills are these groups of students still struggling to master? How would you go about strengthening those weaknesses in your classroom?

3. Could your students pull off this kind of conversation with one another? What do you think it would take to get them to translate their classroom conversations into online forums? What skills would they need to learn first? When will you start teaching those skills?

4. What ideas will you steal from these VoiceThread samples to use in your own work with students? Do the format and content of any of these conversations resonate with you or meet elements of your required curriculum? Which conversation would your students be drawn to? How would you change one of these conversations to make it more appropriate, interesting, or motivating for the students in your classroom?