Resource Review - Using Parlay to Facilitate Discussions[1]

Embracing new technology can be daunting, especially considering educational technology is often recommended without regard to the needs of the students and the specific content being taught. Not all technology touted as the "next best thing" is needed in order to make learning more student-centered and engaging. But, some can. In *It Can Be Done: Engaging and Powerful Social Studies Education Using Technology* (Barrow, 2023a), I review several technology tools used in my Social Studies Methods class. Some worked well, and others flopped. One tool that I have continued to use, and I think warrants further discussion is Parlay (www.parlayideas.com).

Parlay is a web 2.0 technology that can be used to facilitate both live, face-to-face discussions, and online asynchronous discussions. Live discussions are set up like a Socratic Seminar.[2] Teachers and students are in the same room, sitting in a circle, and discussing a text, the only difference is that instead of physically raising a hand to talk, students use the technology to indicate their desire to speak and how they want to participate. Using Parlay, students can ask a question, build off what someone else has said, challenge what someone else has said, or start a new conversation thread. In asynchronous discussions, students are given prompts to answer and then practice responding and giving feedback to their classmates for their responses. For both live and asynchronous discussions, teachers can choose from the library of resources in the Parlay Universe, create their own discussions, or use the new Parlay Genie (AI) to set up their discussions. I personally, have not had much success with the Parlay Genie, but as with any AI program, changes and improvements are being made all the time.

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[1] The author is not being compensated by Parlay. All opinions are are those of the author.
[2] For more information about Socratic Seminars, check out this resource from Facing History and Ourselves.

So why use technology when traditional methods of discussion work? Preliminary research indicates that using Parlay can lead to increased student preparation for and engagement in whole group discussions (Barrow, 2023b). My college students admitted that sometimes the technology can be a distraction; however, the majority of students in my Spring 2023 class reported that the technology made it easier to participate in a face-to-face discussion because they had easier access to materials and resources, and the features in Parlay diminished interruptions. The following are quotes from my students after a semester of using Parlay to facilitate face-to-face discussions in class.

> *It gives people a chance to speak in the order they were tapped in, so if the discussion was based on raising hands, some people could be overlooked.*
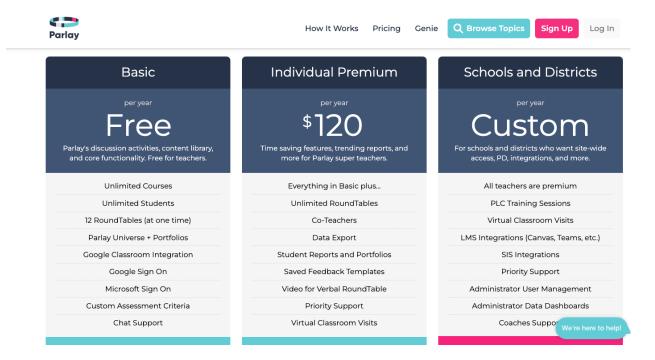
> *It makes it easier to participate in a whole group discussion. People are able to wait their turn and speak on turn so it is very helpful to use technology.*

> *It [technology] eliminates interruptions and allows you to gather [your] thoughts and hear from everyone.*

This short video walks you through how I use Parlay with my students. Parlay offers both free and professional accounts. See image 1 below. The free account limits the number of roundtables you can have at a given time, but gives you access to the basic components of Parlay. The pro version provides more options for student feedback and analysis.

Image 1

Parlay Pricing and Options

Basic	Individual Premium	Schools and Districts
per year	per year	per year
Free	**$120**	**Custom**
Parlay's discussion activities, content library, and core functionality. Free for teachers.	Time saving features, trending reports, and more for Parlay super teachers.	For schools and districts who want site-wide access, PD, integrations, and more.
Unlimited Courses	Everything in Basic plus...	All teachers are premium
Unlimited Students	Unlimited RoundTables	PLC Training Sessions
12 RoundTables (at one time)	Co-Teachers	Virtual Classroom Visits
Parlay Universe + Portfolios	Data Export	LMS Integrations (Canvas, Teams, etc.)
Google Classroom Integration	Student Reports and Portfolios	SIS Integrations
Google Sign On	Saved Feedback Templates	Priority Support
Microsoft Sign On	Video for Verbal RoundTable	Administrator User Management
Custom Assessment Criteria	Priority Support	Administrator Data Dashboards
Chat Support	Virtual Classroom Visits	Coaches Suppo...

Note: Screenshot from Parlay website (10/11/23)

Like any new technology or strategy you use with your students, it takes time and practice. Don't get discouraged! For more information about using Parlay, check out my Wakelet page by scanning this QR code.

References

Barrow, E. (2023a). It can be done: Engaging and powerful social studies education using technology. *The Clearinghouse: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, (96)*1, 23-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2022.2158157

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