

Task for *The Lost Thing*

Panel discussion

Panel discussions are usually less formal than a debate. They are often seen in the media or at conventions and generally consist of experts in a given field. In these cases there is often a chairperson who guides the direction of the discussion, but doesn't dominate it. Rather, the chairperson encourages contributions from all panel members.

- In our panel discussions, you are all expected to act, in some ways, like a chairperson. You will:
 - encourage contributions from others (*e.g. asking questions*);
 - guide the direction of the discussion into particular topic areas;
 - maintain the flow of the discussion (*avoiding silences*);
 - keep the discussion focused on the given topic (*while some digression and humour is good, it is important that the central focus is returned quickly to the topic*)
- The panel has been left general and open-ended for a variety of reasons.
 - Panel members should speak from their expert knowledge – not a script.
 - Interesting panel discussions have their members feeding off each other's comments. To an audience it would sound like an intelligent, focused conversation. Narrowly focused topics in the form of a question can result in a rigid, narrow range of comments.
 - There may be disagreements about attitudes and interpretations. These are often the most interesting parts of a discussion. It means members have to clearly explain the reasons for the ideas, while not ridiculing the views of others. (*The best way to challenge the view of someone is not through ridicule or scorn, but through reason and enthusiasm for your own ideas.*)
 - Open-ended topics allow your panel to branch off into different directions and allow you to draw on your broader knowledge about the world and/or other texts. While this kind of thing is encouraged, be aware of the limited time you have – this means getting back on track as quickly as possible.
 - As well as demonstrating knowledge of the text, open-ended topics allow you to include your opinions, emotions and other responses to the text. What matters here is that you can elaborate and clarify the comments you make.
 - By having open-ended topics and being an 'expert panel member' there is little need for panel members to get together before the panel discussion.

Hints for making worthwhile contributions to panel discussions:

- Prepare some specific points you would like to make.
- Come up with some questions you can pose to the panel. (Preferably, these questions will guide the discussion to the direction you want to take it – so you can make the points you've already prepared.)
- Practise articulating complex points (that is, practise how you will express and elaborate them in meaningful detail). This will involve having a range of references from the text on hand to support your views.
- If someone beats you to the point you'd planned to make – don't panic. Express your agreement and add to the point by, for instance, giving another example from the text to support the point.

GOOD LUCK