

Rakoff Clip 4

[These facilitator notes provide commentary and ideas that might be helpful as you use these raw video clips with other educators.]

A first thing to note is that this discussion happens right after a ten-minute small group discussion, so everyone has had a chance to think through these questions before being asked to discuss in the whole class. This move often makes discussions richer, makes more students comfortable participating, and makes it less intimidating if you are going to use techniques like cold calling and Socratic questioning.

Rakoff also starts with making sure students are comprehending the general facts at hand. Notice his humor (“oh no, no, no”) when no one volunteers to answer the question after the benefit of a small group discussion. While funny, this also helps establish a norm of participation.

In the middle of this clip, there are a delicate set of exchanges when Rakoff presses four female students in a row, including telling one student: “I don’t pay you to give me a sentence that says ‘If it were,’” and another: “We can do better than that. What you said was not wrong, just not completely right.” Our read as IM consultants who filmed the class and interviewed students is that Rakoff is quite trusted and respected, and that students tend to appreciate that he is holding students to high standards and pushing their thinking. He also takes time to validate various aspects of their thinking. How do you create the conditions when pushing students is seen as supportive rather than aggressive or oppressive? How hard can you push? Is it different for different students? What kind of feedback might you solicit to check and see if you are hitting the mark?

At 1:02:01, Rakoff pivots from general fact finding to evaluating the main choice of this case. Note how he has scaffolded this discussion, with the preview that everyone will have to vote at the end as a way to keep them thinking, forcing them to take a position, and making the thinking of the class visible.