Verbal tags to foster classroom discussion

- **Clarifying a student's contribution:** "It sounds like what you're saying is... is that right?" [instructor doesn't assume they've got it right or put words in student's mouth, gives student authority to say it their way]

- **Asking the class to apply the lens to a text discussed last class:** "I'm kind of putting you on the spot, but let's try it..." [recognizes a challenging task and gives students permission to not have immediate perfect answers]

- **Responding to an unexpected reading:** "I hadn't thought of that moment that way, that's interesting! Tell me more." [works when you genuinely do find the reading interesting and unexpected, and that's audible in your voice]

- **Opening a question out to the class:** "You're not the only one with this question so let's throw it out..." [instead of you being the authority who answers all questions, you let them figure it out with you guiding them]

- **After stumbling over your own words explaining the lens:** "Hopefully you can see how my difficulty in articulating this idea is a productive one!" [instead of brushing it under the rug, acknowledges that you may have confused them, or may be confused yourself, and still make it teachable]

- **Responding to a vaguely remembered example:** "That's a good example, do you want to say something more about that?" [to the class] Let's go to that example." [decenters you as the voice of authority and gives them agency to explore an idea]

After rereading that example: "Now that we've reread, how can we rearticulate the idea?" [follows up the centering by giving them a concrete opportunity to express their agency and have a voice]

- **Encouraging dialogue between one student who corrected another student's inaccurate explanation:** "That's a helpful clarification." [instead of brushing a student's contribution under the rug or declaring him/her wrong, acknowledges that the first student wasn't accurate but in a way that affirms both students' contributions]

- **Clarifying the author's voice:** "So, in the reading you've just offered, and I think Cosuto would support you in this, it's..." [places authority in the author instead of you, so it's the author's voice that's clarifying an imprecise student articulation]

- **Signposting:** "I think we've got the idea? But I don't want to assume, tell me." [alternative to the "Does anyone have a question?" which puts them on the spot]

- **Working through an idea the students are having difficulty with:** "Let's pull out the steps of Cosuto's process of objectification; can we rearticulate them for ourselves?" [models a step-wise thought process, gives them intellectual agency, allows them to repeat/rephrase important ideas in their own terms]
• Distinguishing between the author and the narrator's voice: "Isn't that a problem for the example's author?" [makes it so the text/author challenges the student's imprecise reading, instead of you, the instructor who's an expert, challenging them]

• Reassuring a student whose earlier contribution has been corrected by another student (the contribution was left written on the board but struck through, not erased): "Maybe 'wholesome' wasn't the word you were looking for, but 'authentic' or..." [instead of removing/rejecting the earlier student's contribution on the board, it keeps it in circulation and allows that student to revise their contribution with your assistance]

• Creating dialogue between students: "... which I think gets back to what XXX was saying..." [referring to the student by name and making connections this way affirms them as intelligent contributors to the conversation, as local experts in that day's classroom]

• Juxtaposing two students' contributions to synthesize something new: "Let's put these two observations together and see where it can lead us." [instructor uses good observations to demonstrate synthesis and application.]

• Asking one student to respond to an idea from another student: "Brian, you wrote a LATTE post that had something related to say about the text, how would you respond to Alix's idea?" [promotes a student-centered class; one student can apply his thoughts to another student's idea, showing that all students in class embody resources for each other to tap]

• Stop and take stock: "What we've figured out so far is..." [roadmap of where class has been can both acknowledge student contributions (use names) and clarify for students having difficulty following]

• Cold calling: "XXX, is that a hand up? It looks like you have something to add." [a way for quiet students reluctant to speak up to enter into the conversation, without forcing him/her to produce an answer; can break up disruptive chatter]

Another method: "XXX, what do you think about that?" [can rope in disconnected students]

• Volleying: "XXX? [student contribution] OK [in an approving tone]. XXX?" [acknowledges student viewpoint and validates the usefulness of their voice to the class as a whole, levels the playing field so both bright and struggling students are treated as worthy of inclusion in the conversation]

• Observing student reaction: "XXX, you're looking pretty pensive over there. Tell me about some of your thoughts on this passage" or "I see a lot of confused faces here. Tell me a little bit about why this passage is leaving everyone perplexed." [gives students permission to have an opinion, to voice frustration, to object to a text or to the reading of a text currently in the air]
• Casting a poll/vote: “Can I get a quick show of hands of people who found this text easy? Hard? Medium? Utterly confusing?” [encourages active thinking on the fly, gives you a general sense of class reactions to ideas/passages, livens stagnant class atmospheres, esp. in mornings]

Another method: “We’ve identified these passages as key. Who wants to cover XXX first? Who wants to cover YYY first? …” [gives students agency over the direction of the conversation and allows students to indicate where they need attention paid]