

Socratic Seminar

Socrates, a Classical Greek philosopher, was convinced that the surest way to attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation. He called this method *dialectic*, meaning the art or practice of examining opinions or ideas logically, often by the method of question and answer, so as to determine their validity.



The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. A Socratic Seminar is a method to try to understand information by creating a dialectic in class in regards to a specific text. In a Socratic Seminar, participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas in the text through rigorously thoughtful dialogue. This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent.

Students are given opportunities to "examine" a common piece of text, whether it is in the form of a novel, poem, art print, or piece of music. After "reading" the common text "like a love letter", several questions are posed -- primarily open-ended, world connection, universal theme, and literary analysis questions. Such questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in text, and express ideas with clarity and confidence. After all, a certain degree of emotional safety is felt by participants when they understand that this format is based on dialogue and not discussion/debate.

Dialogue is exploratory and involves the suspension of biases and prejudices. Discussion/debate is a transfer of information designed to win an argument and bring closure. Americans are great at discussion/debate. We do not dialogue well. However, once teachers and students learn to dialogue, they find that the ability to ask meaningful questions that stimulate thoughtful interchanges of ideas is more important than "the answer."

Participants in a Socratic Seminar respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement. Members of the dialogue look each other in the "eyes" and use each other names. This simple act of socialization reinforces appropriate behaviors and promotes team building.

BEFORE SOCRATIC SEMINAR

1. Read the text and "Talk to the Text"
2. Fill out the Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet
3. Fill out the Socratic Seminar Questions Worksheet

DURING SOCRATIC SEMINAR

1. Have Text, Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet, and Socratic Seminar Questions Worksheet out on your desk.
2. If in the inner circle, you will participate in a dialogue during the Socratic Seminar.
3. If in the outer circle, you will be assigned a partner that you will observe when they are in the inner circle. Fill out the observation form. You must turn in the form that you filled out for your partner.

AFTER SOCRATIC SEMINAR

1. Socratic Seminar Debrief
2. Socratic Reflective Writing

Underlined papers must be stapled and turned in (in the order above).

BEFORE SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Reading the Text

1. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section. Pay attention to your first impression as to what the reading is about. Look for the main points and then go back and reread it.
2. The second time you read it, talk to the text.
 - a. Underline major points or forceful statements.
 - b. Put vertical lines at the margins to emphasize a statement already underlined or a passage too long to be underlined.
 - c. Put an (*) to emphasize major points.
 - d. Put numbers in margin to indicate sequence of points.
 - e. Put numbers of other pages where point is also mentioned.
 - f. Circle key words or phrases.
 - g. Write in the margin questions that come to mind.

Fill out the Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet

Fill out the Socratic Seminar Questions Worksheet

Socratic Seminar Questions

Opening Questions (Level 1)	Core Questions (Level 2)	Closing (Level 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates to text • Uses concrete examples • Open-ended • Is not a yes or no question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops theme • Leads into the abstract • Leads to further questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates to self • Relates to reality
<p>EXAMPLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the author mean when he says... "with torn and bleeding hearts we smile?" • When do you wear a mask? • When do masks "grin and lie?" • What would make the author say "But let the world dream otherwise." 	<p>EXAMPLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a time when we can see below the mask people wear? • What is the purpose of wearing a mask? • What is your response to people who wear masks? • Can masks belie the wearer? 	<p>EXAMPLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think was the wisdom that the author was trying to impart to you? • What in your thinking has changed about the way you treat people who wear masks?

DURING SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Socratic Seminar Rules

- Discuss, do not debate.
- Be courteous, NO PUTDOWNS.
- Goal is the pursuit of deeper understanding.
- Respect different thoughts and ideas.

Socratic Seminar Tips

Your Goal is to Understand...

- the ideas,
- issues,
- concepts,
- and values reflected in the text.

Protocol:

- Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. This is not a test of memory.
- Do not stay confused; as for clarification of both ideas and definitions.
- Discuss ideas, rather than other's opinions.
- It's OK to pass when your turn comes; participate at another time instead.
- Do not participate if you are not prepared.
- Stick to the point currently under discussion; write down inspirational ideas so you can bring them up at a more appropriate time in the conversation.
- Listen carefully, especially when you are waiting to speak, as they may be moving on to another point.
- Speak up so that all participants can hear you; don't speak while others are.
- Remember that this is a conversation between students, not between student and teacher.

Basic steps to forming opinions:

1. What is it that I think I know? Or that the author thinks he/she knows? Can I restate his/her ideas in my own words? What needs clarification? Definition?
2. Is it true? Why do I think so? What else do I need to know or understand before deciding?
3. What inferences can be drawn from this? What are the implications of this? So what? How does this change things?
4. What are the underlying assumptions with this claim?
5. What are the reasons I believe this? How do I know what I think I know? Is the evidence credible?
6. How does this happen in other situations? In the world? How does this connect to other stuff?
7. Can I think of a counter example? When this doesn't happen? Why doesn't it happen? Are there internal contradictions?

<p>Affirm ideas of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My idea is related to _____'s idea... • I really like _____'s idea about... • I resonate with what _____ said... • You made a great point about... • My idea builds on _____'s idea. 	<p>Analyze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we break down into these areas, we can see that... • Each component plays a key role. First... • The parts are related in the following ways: • Let's see how the pieces fit together to make... 	<p>Apply learning to other subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We also learned about this in... • This is similar to what we do in (science) when we... • The character in the novel is like a person from my history text because...
<p>Ask for clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you elaborate on that? • In other words, are you saying... • I have a question about... • It's not quite clear. Can you explain the part about...? • Do you mean that...? • Can you clarify the point about _____ for me? 	<p>Compare and Contrast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are similar because... • Notice how the two compare... • This is a lot like how... • The two differ because one..., while the other... • On the other hand,... • They share the following traits: 	<p>Disagree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Then again, we shouldn't forget... • I see it differently. Based on... • That's a valid point, but I feel... • I do agree with the part about..., but... • True, but what about... • I understand the idea of..., but I feel that...
<p>Express Opinions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe that... • In my opinion... • I happen to feel that... • Because..., I think that... • I tend to think that... 	<p>Predict or Infer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can infer that... because... • I bet that... because... • Based on I guess that... • The evidence points to the idea that... • I predict that... because... 	

When you want to...

Seminar Questioning Cheat Sheet

Clarification Questions:

- What do you mean by _____?
- What is your main point?
- How does _____ relate to _____?
- Could you put that another way?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean ___ or ___?
- Jane, would you summarize in your own words what Juan has said?... Juan, is that what you meant?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: _____?
- Could you explain that further?
- Could you expand upon that?

Questions About the Initial Question or Issue:

- How can we find out?
- What does this question assume?
- Would _____ put the question differently?
- How could someone settle this question?
- Can we break this question down at all?
- Is the question clear? Do we understand it?
- Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?
- Does this question ask us to evaluate something?
- Do we all agree that this is the question?
- To answer this question, what question would we have to answer first?
- I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting the main question at issue.
- Is this the same issue as _____?
- How would _____ put this issue?
- Why is this question important?
- Does this question lead to other questions or issues?

Assumption Probes:

- What are you assuming?
- What is Erika assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming _____. Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning depends on the idea that _____. Why have you based your reasoning on _____ rather than _____?
- You seem to be assuming _____. How would you justify taking this for granted?
- Why would someone make this assumption?

Reason and Evidence Probes:

- What would be an example?
- How do you know?
- Why do you think that is true?
- Do you have any evidence for that?
- What difference does that make?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- What other information do we need?
- Could you explain your reason to use?

Reason and Evidence Probes (continued):

- Are these reasons adequate?
- Can you explain how you logically got from _____ to _____?
- Do you see any difficulties with their reasoning here?
- Why did you say that?
- What led you to that belief?
- How does that apply to this case?
- What would change your mind?
- But is that good evidence to believe that?
- Is there a reason to doubt that evidence?
- Who is in a position to know if that is so?
- What would you say to someone who said _____?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

Origin or Source Questions:

- Where did you get this idea?
- Do your friends or family feel the same way?
- Has the media influenced you?
- Have you always felt this way?
- What caused you to feel this way?
- Did you originate this idea or get it from someone else?

Implication and Consequence Probes:

- What are you implying by that?
- When you say _____, are you implying _____?
- But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is the probability of this result?
- What is an alternative?
- If this and this are the case, then what else must also be true?
- If we say that this is unethical, how about that?

Viewpoint Questions:

- You seem to be approaching this issue from _____ perspective. Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
- How would other groups/types of people respond? Why? What would influence them?
- How could you answer the objection that _____ would make?
- What might someone who believed _____ think?
- Can/did anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?
- What is an alternative?
- How are Hillary and Tom's ideas alike? Different?