The Socratic Seminar
A “Test” of your ability to READ carefully, LISTEN closely, work COOPERATIVELY, THINK deeply, and SPEAK precisely.
**Three Kinds of Teaching and Learning**

These three columns do not correspond to separate courses or disciplines, and one kind of teaching or learning is not confined to any one class.

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What does Socratic mean?

Socratic comes from the name Socrates. Socrates (ca. 470-399 B.C.) was a Classical Greek philosopher who developed a Theory of Knowledge.

What was Socrates' Theory of Knowledge?

Socrates was convinced that the surest way to attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation. He called this method dialectic.

What does dialectic mean?

di-a-lec-tic (noun) means the art or practice of examining opinions or ideas logically, often by the method of question and answer, so as to determine their validity.

How did Socrates use the dialectic?

He would begin with a discussion of the obvious aspects of any problem. Socrates believed that through the process of dialogue, where all parties to the conversation were forced to clarify their ideas, the final outcome of the conversation would be a clear statement of what was meant. The technique appears simple but it is intensely rigorous. Socrates would fein ignorance about a subject and try to draw out from the other person his fullest possible knowledge about it. His assumption was that by progressively correcting incomplete or inaccurate notions, one could coax the truth out of anyone. The basis for this assumption was an individual's capacity for recognizing lurking contradictions. If the human mind was incapable of knowing
something, Socrates wanted to demonstrate that, too. Some dialogues, therefore, end inconclusively.

**What is a Socratic Seminar?**

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, rather than by memorizing bits of information.

**The Text:** Socratic Seminar texts are chosen for their richness in ideas, issues, and values and their ability to stimulate extended, thoughtful dialogue. A seminar text can be drawn from readings in literature, history, science, math, health, and philosophy or from works of art or music. A good text raises important questions in the participants' minds, questions for which there are no right or wrong answers. At the end of a successful Socratic Seminar participants often leave with more questions than they brought with them.

**The Question:** A Socratic Seminar opens with a question either posed by the leader or solicited from participants as they acquire more experience in seminars. An opening question has no right answer; instead it reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the questioner. A good opening question leads participants back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved. Responses to the opening question generate new questions from the leader and participants, leading to new responses. In this way, the line of inquiry in a Socratic Seminar evolves on the spot rather than being pre-determined by the leader.
The Leader: In a Socratic Seminar, the leader plays a dual role as leader and participant. The seminar leader consciously demonstrates habits of mind that lead to a thoughtful exploration of the ideas in the text by keeping the discussion focused on the text, asking follow-up questions, helping participants clarify their positions when arguments become confused, and involving reluctant participants while restraining their more vocal peers. As a seminar participant, the leader actively engages in the group's exploration of the text. To do this effectively, the leader must know the text well enough to anticipate varied interpretations and recognize important possibilities in each. The leader must also be patient enough to allow participants' understandings to evolve and be willing to help participants explore non-traditional insights and unexpected interpretations.

Assuming this dual role of leader and participant is easier if the opening question is one which truly interests the leader as well as the participants.

The Participants: In a Socratic Seminar, participants carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the seminar. Good seminars occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas. Eventually, when participants realize that the leader is not looking for right answers but is encouraging them to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly, they discover the excitement of exploring important issues through shared inquiry. This excitement creates willing participants, eager to examine ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful manner.
### Dialogue versus Debate

| Dialogue                                                                 | Debate                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|                                                                            |
| is collaborative; multiple sides work toward shared understanding       | is oppositional; two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong          |
| one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground   | one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter argument    |
| enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view              | affirms a participant's point of view                                     |
| reveals assumptions for re-evaluation                                   | defends assumptions as truth                                               |
| creates an open-minded attitude, an openness to being wrong and an      | creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right              |
| openness to change                                                      |                                                                            |
| • one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other peoples'       | one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show  |
| reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it                | that it is right                                                          |
| • calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs                        | • calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs                     |
| • one searches for strengths in all positions                            | • one searches for weaknesses in the other position                        |
| • respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or      | • rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other          |
| offend                                                                  | participants                                                               |
| • assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation  | • assumes a single right answer that someone already possesses             |
| can lead to workable solutions                                           | • demands a conclusion.                                                   |
| • remains open-ended                                                    |                                                                            |
**Guidelines for Socratic Seminar Facilitators**

Your task is not to make participants "cover" the topic but to help them use their minds well. You are a co-learner, not an authority on "right" answers.

Don’t try long texts or long seminars at first, build gradually.

Read the text in advance and take ample notes to have a deep understanding.

Get the group focused on the opening question as quickly as possible.

Allow for "think" time. Pauses are OK, students need time to think and process information and ideas.

Model thoughtful behavior. Ask clarifying and probing questions.

Don’t let sloppy thinking or gross misinterpretations go unexamined.

It may be necessary to avoid making eye contact with participants when they are talking so they learn to talk to the group and not just the teacher.

Strive for balance. Do not dominate the discussion or withdraw entirely.

Never neglect the debriefing. The feedback is vital if the group is going to grow with each Socratic Seminar. Request specific non-judgmental comments to help improve future Socratic Seminars.

Over time, use a variety of works: fiction, essays, poetry, quotations, artwork, etc.
Guidelines for Socratic Seminars
Participants

Refer to the text when you need to during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject" -- you are aiming at understanding ideas, issues and values.

It's okay to "pass" when asked to contribute.

Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.

Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.

Stick to the point; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.

Don't raise hands; take turns.

Speak up, so that all can hear you.

Listen carefully.

Talk to each other, not just to the teacher.

You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Seminar

Did the Participants...

• Speak loudly and clearly?
• Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
• Use the text to find support?
• Listen to others respectfully?
• Stick with the subject?
• Talk to each other, not just to the leader?
• Paraphrase accurately?
• Avoid inappropriate language (slang, technical terms, sloppy diction, etc.)?
• Ask for help to clear up confusion?
• Support each other?
• Avoid hostile exchanges?
• Question others in a civil manner?
• Seem prepared?

Structure of a Socratic Seminar
1. Use an article or a piece of literature that is controversial or can inspire
discussion from multiple points of view.
2. Use an inner and outer circle. If you have a large class, you may have two circles
going simultaneously.
3. Each inner circle participant is assigned an outer circle partner. That person is to
observe his/her partner throughout the entire discussion.
4. In the inner circle, there is a discussion leader.
5. In the inner circle, there is a hot seat.

**Discussion Leader:** This is the person who begins and ends the discussion. Always
allow the discussion leader to end the discussion in his/her own time. Usually this
person will begin the seminar with a brief statement about the article. Choose a
strong-willed and strong-voiced person to be the discussion leader. Also pick
someone who is sympathetic and will validate other people’s opinions. For example,
a discussion leader might have to “get on” a student for interrupting. If he interrupts
repeatedly, he/she should be firm with him/her. Not every ninth grader has the ability
to be firm without being hurtful. However, students can also be too strong with their
voices and opinions, and they don’t appropriately handle the other students. You will
figure it out through trial and error, discussion and de-brief. Not all students
participate as the discussion leader...It is more appropriate to choose the students
who enjoy the role and not force others into it against their will. For some students, it
is scary enough just to participate in the circle itself. It is the discussion leader’s
responsibility to bring the discussion back to the article and keep it on track.
Students come prepared with questions, and the discussion leader allows students
to ask their questions throughout the seminar. He/she must make sure that everyone
speaks at some point in the discussion and that no one person dominates.

**Hot Seat:** This is an empty seat in the inner circle. Outer circle participants may
“jump in” to make a point, but then “jump out.” They may not stay and debate the
entire point. They comment, and then they leave! The discussion leader must
acknowledge the hot seat as soon as it becomes pertinent to do so. Do not allow
students to jump into the hot seat twice in a row. Another student must occupy the
hot seat before an outer circle participant is allowed back in. You may want to limit
the number of times they can “jump in,” because your gregarious students who are
relegated to the outer circle sometimes will attempt to dominate the discussion. That
is not their role in this!

**Student Tips:**

- Cite specific evidence or text in questions and responses.
- Take notes (outer circle).
- Extend questions
- Engage other members or inner circle.
- Avoid discounting questions, responses – explore possibilities.
- Disagree. Demonstrate.
• Extend responses of inner circle by phrasing questions based on those responses.
• Avoid statements of belief. Make assertions based on text and reasons.
• Explain. Elaborate. Speculate. Discuss.

Sample questions that demonstrate constructive participation in Socratic Seminars.
Here is my view and how I arrived at it. How does it sound to you?
Do you see gaps in my reasoning?
Do you have different data?
Do you have different conclusions?
How did you arrive at your view?
Are you taking into account something different from what I have considered?

Preparation: Students are to read the article for homework. They are to come up with five "higher level" questions about the article. They need to spend a lot of time on questioning strategies before attempting Socratic Seminar. In the AVID model, higher level questioning is a large part of the curriculum. Once the students are comfortable with questioning strategies and questioning vocabulary, have them come up with questions. For example, if they read an article from the Austin American Statesman titled “Perry Praises School Prayer,” they should come prepared with questions related to the article and to school prayer. Allow the school prayer questions too, and trust the discussion leader to help them return to the article. All students must come up with questions—both inner and outer circles. It is suggested to determine your circles based on their questions, their personalities, and prior participation.

Do not allow the outer circle to talk until the discussion is over. Then allow them to say one thing they wished they could have said, or to ask one of their questions that was not discussed.

Have the partners conference when they’re done and provide feedback.

Have the entire class do some sort of written reflection on the article and the discussion.
SOCRATIC SEMINAR LEADER BEHAVIORS

Asks a series of questions that give direction to the seminar.

Makes sure the questions are understood or rephrases them until they are understood.

Raises issues that lead to further discussion.

Asks questions that allow for a range of answers deserving consideration.

Allows for discussion of conflict or differences.

Examines answers and draws out implications or reason.

Insists that answers be clear or rephrased until they are clear.

Requests that reasons be given.

Does not entertain answers for argument’s sake alone.

10. Pursues questions and issues raised by answers.

11. Does not insist upon general agreement to a single answer.

12. Raises all sides of an argument.
Socratic Seminars are a highly motivating form of intellectual and scholarly discourse conducted in K-12 classrooms. They usually range from 30 to 50 minutes—longer if time allows—once a week. Socratic Seminars foster active learning as participants explore and evaluate the ideas, issues and values in a particular text.

- **Leader** - Lead thoughtful exploration of ideas in the text (dual roles in seminar)
  
  Participant - the leader actively engages in the group exploration of the text

- **Inner Circle** - No more than 8 in the circles (post a list of outside the door of the seating order)

- **Outer Circle** - 20 to 25 for ideal participants. Participants sit outside the circle. Each participant is assigned an inner circle participant to observe throughout the entire discussion.

- **Hot Seat** - This is an empty seat. Anyone from the outer circle may “jump in” to make a point and then “jump out”. (They may not stay and debate the point) They comment and then they leave. Limit the number of times a student can use the hot seat.

- **Preparation** - Students will read the article for homework. They are to come with five “higher level” questions about the article.
Planning for a Socratic Seminar

Pre Seminar Activities:

1. Choose a text related to content or an issue to be discussed in the seminar. Good texts are ones that interest the students. Paragraphs and lines (or portions of a score or painting) need to be easily identified and referenced.

2. Design possible opening questions. Good opening questions:
   a. Arise from genuine interest or curiosity on the part of the teacher,
   b. Are open to interpretation (no right or wrong answer),
   c. Foster analysis and a greater understanding of the text,
   d. Are supportable by the text (answered by reference to the text),
   e. Are framed in such a way that they generate dialogue from the students.

3. Teach any background information necessary for a good understanding of the text. This prevents the need for the teacher to interrupt the discussion to clarify or provide additional information.

Seminar Activities:

4. Have approximately half the students put their desks in a circle so that they can see each other. Provide an empty desk for the “hot seat.”
5. Choose an outer circle to critique, trouble-shoot, record main and dropped ideas, journal on what they heard, etc. Students who didn’t do the necessary reading or randomly chose students make up the outer circle. These students may sit in the ‘hot seat” if they want to participate. Forms follow which outer circle students may use to keep track of responses and provide feedback for those in the inner circle.

6. Give students directions:

   a. Start by explaining the Socratic Seminar to the students. Explain that the conversation is theirs, and that your question is a starting point which they can move away from as they pose ideas and questions that are more interesting to them as long as the new ideas and questions can be discussed in terms of the text.
   b. Tell students to direct their comments to other students and explain to them that you will not comment on what they say, since this will cause them to talk to you rather than to each other. It may help if you look down or avoid eye contact until the discussion takes off on its own.
   c. Encourage students to think before they talk, try to comment, or add to what others have said. They should listen to others.

7. Toss out the opening question.

   a. Students have learned to be passive, and this activity can be risky for some students, so it may take time for some groups to catch on. The conversation is likely to have stops and starts, but it is crucial that the teacher not step in and try to rescue the
conversation. If the conversation goes dead, wait. Students will find the silence unbearable before the teachers does. Your silence also indicates your level of commitment to the activity.

b. If students ask you a question, throw it out to the group or ask the questioner what his/her opinion is. Answer factual questions only if there is no way around it.

8. Your role is to:
   a. Observe and make anecdotal notes for feedback and evaluation,
   b. Keep students from having side conversations,
   c. Ask students to cite support from the text if the conversation begins to wander,
   d. Keep conversations from becoming debate or debasement of others,
   e. Ask students to question their assumptions,
   f. Manipulate the amount of participation. If only a few students are speaking, you might say, “Everyone who has spoken so far, look at the clock, and don’t jump in for five minutes.” If one gender is dominating the conversation, ask for the other to speak for the next few minutes. If there are some students not participating at all, teach students how to engage those students in conversation (One teacher put all her reluctant speakers in the inner circle and all the outspoken ones in the outer circle during one seminar.).

Post-Seminar Activities:

9. End the seminar when it feels done. With an experienced group, you might ask the students, or a student might suggest it. If things go really well, a student may suggest
another poem, text, or section to discuss which correlates well with the original text.

a. Spend time processing and self-reflecting on the seminar.

1. Go around the circle and ask each student about the experience. What was good about it? What was not so good? What could be improved for the next time?
2. Let the outer circle discuss group dynamics, but be careful that they focus their comments on group rather than individual behaviors.
3. Let the out circle share their observation sheets with their inner circle partner.

Extension Activities:

Socratic Seminars are good preparation for individual explication or a comparison/contrast essay. Students can journal about the texts discussed.
SAMPLE SOCRATIC SEMINAR
EXAMINING A PAINTING

[ON BOARD: "I see . . .," "I observe . . .," "I notice . . ."]

30 Minutes: Pre-Seminar

1. Point out phrases on the board and explain how they are to be used.

2. Distribute copies of the painting.

3. 2-3 minutes for silent observations. Suggest to students that they may want to list observations.


5. List observations on chart paper.

10 Minutes: Biography of the Painter

30 Minutes: Seminar

Opening Question: What would be a good title for this painting?

30 Minutes: Post-Seminar

Give actual title.

1. Distribute paper.

2. Write opinion: Is this title appropriate? Support your answer.

10 Minutes: Sharing of Written Responses
Title of Seminar

Date______________  Class/Level ______________

Main Concepts/Issues:

Preliminary Activities:

Seminar:

Opening:

Core:

Closing:

Post Activities:
MARKING A TEXT: Why? and How?

To become analytical readers, students must mark their text. When “marking the text” is initially introduced to student, they get puzzled looks on their faces. Not surprising! While teachers may be familiar with purchasing and writing in a text, today’s students have been told to return their text in pristine condition. Truly, marking the text for them is an anathema; consequently, they must be given instruction on how to mark in the text.

Why do students need to mark their text?

• Marking the texts switches reading from a passive exercise to an active one.

• Even though short selections are usually used for in the beginning, later on they can apply these strategies to longer works that require considerable time and organizational skills.

• To quickly access a page, paragraph, or line in the work, students must be familiar with the text. This familiarity does not come from hasty reading, but arises from concentrated effort involving note-taking, reading activities, and marking the text.

How can students mark their text if they are not allowed to write in them? Very short selections can be copied for students; however, longer readings cannot be duplicated. Many teachers overcome this problem with post it notes. These adhere to the page and allow the student to make comments and notes. Other students cut slips of paper like bookmarks, placing them in the text and making notations on them. Once students understand the concept of marking the text, they find ways to compensate without defacing their textbooks.
WAYS TO MARK A TEXT

Marking the text requires the reader to underline, highlight, or take notes on ideas, issues, or themes in the work. The physical act of marking the text locks information into the student’s memory and allows for retrieval of the material later on.

- **Highlight** or underline passages that reveal crucial information, that show changes in character, or that trace the development of character.

- Make notations in the margins as you react to passages that are unique or noteworthy.

- Place a question mark (?) in the margin if you don’t understand what the passage means.

- Put an exclamation mark (!) in the margin to indicate something surprising or unusual.

- Consider using these symbols:
  - an asterisk (*) to emphasize a statement already underlined or to denote a recurring idea.
  - a plus sign (+) or (-) to indicate something you want to remember.
  - Use post it notes for marking major ideas, for cross-referencing ideas, or for easy access to specific pages in the text. Use a variety of colors.
  - a smiling face ☺ shows you agree or like an idea.
  - a frowning face ☹ shows disagreement or dislike.
  - Circle keywords or phrases.
  - Underline vocabulary words you do not know. Jot down a brief definition in the margin, especially if the word is critical to your understanding of the passage.
The Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America – and to the republic for which it stands: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
Pretty Good Student

There once was a pretty good student,
   Who sat in a pretty good class
And was taught by a pretty good teacher,
   Who always let pretty good pass.
   He wasn’t terrific at reading,
   He wasn’t a whiz-bang at math,
But for him, education was leading
   Straight down a pretty good path.
   He didn’t find school too exciting,
   But he wanted to do pretty well,
And he did have some trouble with writing,
   And nobody had taught him to spell.
   When doing arithmetic problems,
Pretty good was regarded as fine.
Five plus five didn’t always add up to 19,
   A pretty good answer was nine.
   The pretty good class that he sat in
Was part of a pretty good school.
   And the student was not an exception,
On the contrary, he was the rule.
The pretty good school that he went to
   Was there in a pretty good town.
   And nobody there seemed to notice
He could not tell a verb from a noun.
The pretty good student in fact was
   Part of a pretty good mob.
And the first time he knew what he lacked was
   When he looked for a pretty good job.
It was then, when he sought a position,
   He discovered that life could be tough.
   And he soon had a sneaky suspicion
Pretty good might not be good enough.
   The pretty good town in our story
Was part of a pretty good state,
   Which had pretty good aspirations,
   And prayed for a pretty good fate.
There once was a pretty good nation,
   Pretty proud of the greatness it had,
   Which learned much too late,
   If you want to be great,
Pretty good is, in fact, pretty bad.

-From “The Osgood File,”
Revenge is a sort of savage justice. The more people try to take revenge, the more the law should punish them. When a man commits a crime, he breaks the law. But when the injured person takes revenge, the person destroys law itself. In taking revenge, a person does indeed get even with his enemy. But when one refuses to take revenge, he shows that he is better than his enemy. King Solomon, I am sure, said it is glorious for a person to forget an injury.

Whatever is past is gone and can’t be changed. Wise people know they have enough to do in the present and with whatever might happen in the future. They don’t spend their time taking revenge. People who spend their time worrying about past injuries just waste their time. Also, no person hurts another person just to hurt him. Rather, it is done for his profit or his own pleasure or his honor or for some other reason he might have. So why should I be angry with someone for loving himself better than he loves me? Suppose someone hurts me because he is evil. Isn’t that just like a thorn or briar which scratches me because it can’t do anything else?

Revenge is most allowable when there is no specific law to correct an injury. However, one must then be careful that the kind of revenge one takes does not break another law.

Some people when they get even want their enemy to know that it will happen. This is a more generous way of acting. Not letting your enemy know you are going to get even is a cowardly thing to do. It is like killing at night from ambush.

There was an Italian ruler, Cosimo de Medici, who said the following to his friends who might betray or injure him: “We read,” He said, “that we are commanded to forgive our enemies. But we never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends.” I think, however, that the spirit of what Job said is truer. He said, “Shall we receive good from God and not also be willing to accept the evil?” The same is true, in part, about friends.

What is certain about planning to get even is that one’s own wounds remain open. If one didn’t spend one’s time trying to take revenge, those injuries would heal and be forgotten. Public or state revenges are, for the most part, good-as in the case of the murders of Julius Caesar. Private revenges are, however, not good. People who take revenge live the life of witches. They cause trouble to others and come to a bad end.
Techniques of Questioning

Questions can take place on a variety of different levels, some easy and close-ended and others more multi-faceted and open-ended. Knowing when to ask the “right” questions can greatly aid in group discussions and study. The following material aims to help students ask the right questions at the right time.

A LEVEL ONE QUESTION
REQUIRES A PERSON TO:

1) **define**
   What’s the definition of “lunar eclipse?” (**define**)
2) **describe**
3) **identify**
   How can we express the equation $$2x (4-5y) +3y = 26$$ in three different ways? (**list**)
4) **list**
5) **name**
6) **observe**
7) **recite**
8) **scan**
   What does the chart show? (**scan**)

A LEVEL TWO QUESTION
REQUIRES A PERSON TO:

1) **analyze**
   In *Native Son*, how does Bigger Thomas’ violence against his gang members reveal a deeply rooted fear of people? (**analyze**)
2) **compare**
3) **contrast**
   In “The Bet” how do the lawyer and the banker differ in their attitude toward capital punishment? (**contrast**)
4) **group**
5) **infer**
   How does the term “manifest destiny” capture the essence of western expansion in the US? (**synthesize**)
6) **sequence**
7) **synthesize**

If the moon is full Aug. 17, July 18, and June 19, when will it be full in April? (**infer**
A LEVEL THREE QUESTION REQUIRES A PERSON TO:

1) apply a principle Using the principle of the “communicative property.”
2) evaluate How can we find out the number of apple trees
3) hypothesize in an orchard having 15 rows, 5 trees each? (apply)
4) imagine
5) judge
6) predict Which of the characters in Great Expectations
7) speculate suffered the most? (judge)

In Catcher in the Rye, how might Phoebe, years later, describe Holden to her children? (speculate)

TIPS FOR USING THIS QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE:

• Level One Questions are often necessary to establish the group’s basic understanding of facts or situations.

• Questioning should not remain in Level One, but should advance to both Level Two and Level Three
# The Three-Story Intellect

## High-Level Thinking Skills

### Key Words:
- Evaluate
- Predict
- Judge
- Assess
- Idealize
- Forecast

1. **What judgment could be made about…..?**
2. **What would you predict if…..?**
3. **How would you prioritize…..?**
4. **Why was ____ better than ____?**
5. **How could you prove or disprove____?**
6. **What evidence supports ____?**

### Key Words:
- Compare
- Inspect
- How is ___ similar to ___?
- Apply
- Develop
- What might we infer from….?  
- Solve
- Infer
- How would you categorize….?
- Classify
- Analyze
- What is the function of….?
- Reason
- Explain
- How would you classify….?
- Distinguish
- What conclusions can you draw?
- Examine
- Why do you think…?
- Contrast
- How is ___ related to ___?  
- How would you summarize…?

### Key Words:
- Who
- Label
- What
- Identify
- When
- Match
- Where
- Name
- Which
- Spell
- Choose
- Select
- Find
- Restate
- Define
- Observe
- What is….?
- When did….?
- Which one…?
- How would you show?
- Who was…?
- Which is the best answer?
- What facts…?
- How would you classify…?
- What is the definition of…?
- How many…..?
Principles of Socratic Questioning

**Socratic Questions**

- Raise Basic Issues
- Probe Beneath the Surface of Things
- Pursue Problematic Areas of Thought
- Help Students to Discover the *Structure* of Their Own Thoughts
- Help Students Develop Sensitivity to Clarity, Accuracy, and Relevance
- Help Students Arrive at Judgment Through Their Own Reasoning
- Help Students Note Claims, Evidence, Conclusions, Questions-at-Issue, Assumptions, Implications, Consequences, Concepts, Interpretations, Points of View – the elements of thought
Pre-Seminar Question-Writing:

Before you come to a Socratic Seminar class, please read the assigned text (novel section, poem, essay, article, etc.) and write at least ________ questions.

Categories for Potential Questions

• Facts and Conditions (What happened to ____?)
• Clarification (What was meant when ____?)
• Cause and Effect (Why did ____ do ____?)
• Multiple Causes (What else might have caused ____?)
• Empathy and Transfer (What would you do in ____’s place when ____?)
• Alternatives (What could have been done to change ____? or What else could ____ have done when ____?)
• Principles, Values, Attitudes, Transfer (How did you feel when ____? or What can be learned from ____?)

• World Connection Question:
  Write a question connecting the text to the real world.
  Example: If you were given only 24 hours to pack your most precious belongings in a back pace and to get ready to leave your home town, what might you pack?  (after reading the first 30 pages of NIGHT).

• Close Ended Question:
  Write a question about the text that will help everyone in the class come to an agreement about events or characters in the text. This question usually has a "correct" answer.
  Example: What happened to Hester Pymne’s husband that she was left alone in Boston without family? (after the first 4 chapters of THE SCARLET LETTER).

• Open Ended Question:
  Write an insightful question about the text that will require proof and group discussion and "construction of logic" to discover or explore the answer to the question.
  Example: Why did Gene hesitate to reveal the truth about the accident to Finny that first day in the infirmary? (after mid-point of A SEPARATE PEACE).

• Universal Theme/Core Question:
  Write a question dealing with a theme(s) of the text that will encourage group discussion about the universality of the text.
  Example: After reading John Gardner's GRENDEL, can you pick out its existential elements?

• Literary Analysis Question:
Write a question dealing with HOW an author chose to compose a literary piece. How did the author manipulate point of view, characterization, poetic form, archetypal hero patterns, for example?

Example: In MAMA FLORA’S FAMILY, why is it important that the story is told through flashback?

THE POWER OF THE QUESTION

SKILLED QUESTIONING CAN:

• STIMULATE, ASSESS, GUIDE THINKING

• MOTIVATE STUDENTS

• FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION

• ELICIT DEEPER PROCESSING OF INFORMATION

• HOW WELL ARE THEY MASTERING CONTENT?

• THE NATURE OF THE QUESTION DETERMINES THE NATURE OF THE RESPONSE

• KEEPS STUDENTS ON TASK

• ASSESS STUDENTS’ COMPREHENSION LEVEL

TIPS FOR KEEPING SEMINARS
RUNNING SMOOTHLY

To prepare, study text carefully. Focus on formulating provocative questions while studying. Select short passages or specific details for special attention.

Choose an introductory question in advance that is broad, open-ended and provocative.

At the start of each seminar, set the stage. Review the guidelines of the seminar. A few brief comments are in order, but remember, you’re not there to deliver a lecture.

Listen hard, so that you can follow every answer, if necessary, with another question.

Stick with the subject at hand. Do not let the discussion wander or participants pontificate. Insist on standards of intellectual rigor. A good seminar is not a “bull session.”

Neither praise nor put down comments. Your role is to press participants to clarify or amplify their ideas. Remember your role is to be a facilitator and co-learner, not an authority on “correct” thinking.

Allow for “pauses,” silent moments during the seminar. As teachers this is difficult, but key to the success of the seminar. If participants are not talking, they are thinking and that is a good thing. “Pauses” are good.

Take notes during the seminar. At the end of the session, sum up what you heard. Then give the group time for clarification or additions.

Take time for the group to de-brief the seminar. Use the feedback to guide future seminars.

Principles of Socratic Questioning
LISTENING AND SPEAKING IN A SEMINAR

One goal of seminars is to understand the ideas and thoughts of others through asking questions and listening to answers. This means that seminar participants must practice how to agree and disagree. Participants must be able to disagree without being disagreeable. In order to do so, the participants can use the following suggested ways of responding as a way of framing their thoughts before they speak. Speaking and responding in a calm, collaborative manner is essential to good discussion and dialogue.

I agree with __________ because, but I want to add another reason why I think __________ is true. (Give another reason.) __________

I disagree with __________ because __________

I'm not sure why __________ said __________. Can you reword your comments to help me understand?

I understand your point, __________, but I want to add/disagree/give another side: __________

This is what I think you are saying.

___________ Is that correct?

ACTIVE LEARNER LANGUAGE STRATEGIES
INTERRUPTING

Excuse me, but…(e.g., I don’t quite understand/I have a point to make).
Sorry for interrupting, but…(e.g., I don’t understand/I missed that definition).
May I interrupt for a moment?

ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

I have a question about that.
Could you repeat that?
In other words, are you saying that…?
Could you please explain what ______ means?
So, do you mean…?
Would you mind repeating that definition?
Could you please say more about that?
Could you give me an example of that?
I’m not sure I understood that word/term/concept. Could you please give us another example?
Would you mind going over the instructions for us again?
What is the difference between ______ and ______?

REQUESTING INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE

Could you please help me?
I am having trouble with this. Would you mind helping me?
Will you please show me how to do this/write this/draw this/solve this?
Could you please write that term/word on the board?
Could you pronounce that word for me again?
Can you please help me do this?
Can I talk to you for a moment after class about the assignment?

Observation Form
Inner-Outer Discussion Circle
Your name _____________________  Partner _______________________

DIRECTIONS: Each time your partner does one of the following, put a check in the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKS IN THE DISCUSSION</th>
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<tr>
<th>LOOKS AT PERSON WHO IS SPEAKING</th>
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<th>REFERS TO THE TEXT</th>
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<th>ASKS A QUESTION</th>
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<th>RESPONDS TO ANOTHER SPEAKER</th>
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<th>INTERRUPTS ANOTHER SPEAKER</th>
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<tr>
<th>ENGAGES IN SIDE CONVERSATION</th>
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AFTER DISCUSSION: What is the most interesting thing your partner said?

AFTER DISCUSSION: What would you like to have said in the discussion?

**De-Briefing**
• Share specific and non-judgmental observations from the seminar.

• Place today’s dialogue in context of previous seminars.

• Discuss specific goals and strategies for future seminars.

• In the course of the seminar:
  ➢ What was the most interesting question?
  ➢ What was the most interesting idea to come from a participant?
  ➢ What was the best thing you observed?
  ➢ What was the most troubling thing you observed?
  ➢ What do you think should be done differently in the next seminar?

• How would you rate the seminar? (Check One)

  ___Excellent (Everyone participated, listened, had good ideas, did not interrupt.)

  ___Good (Generally, everyone participated but the seminar could have better ideas and behavior.)

  ___Fair (Side talk, interruptions, students distracted.)

  ___Poor (Lots of side talk, interruptions, and rude behavior.)

• How many times did the facilitator have to stop the seminar?

   _____

Discussion Evaluation Form
How many participants spoke? ________

Problems/Difficulties:

   Silence _____  Arguments _____  Disinterest _____
   Not listening _____  Dominance _____  Interrupting _____
   Other: _______________________

Successes:

   Cooperation _____  Balanced participation _____
   Active listening _____  Respectful _____
   Responding to each other _____  Focused _____
   Other: _______________________

How would you rate this discussion on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the best)?
   ______

   Why?

Socratic Seminar Student
Grade Sheet

Name:

Topic/Question:

Score your performance in today’s seminar using the following criteria:

4-Excellent 3-Good 2-Poor 1- Unsatisfactory

_____ I studied the text carefully and took notes in advance.
_____ I contributed several relevant comments.
_____ I stated ideas and questions in a concise and precise manner.
_____ I cited specific evidence from the text to support an idea.
_____ I asked at least one thoughtful, probing question.
_____ I questioned or asked someone to clarify their comment.
_____ I encouraged other participants to enter the conversation.
_____ I treated all other participants with dignity and respect.

Overall Score (circle one)

1  1.5  2  2.5  3  3.5  4

Two goals I have for our next seminar are:

1)
2)

Socratic Seminar Facilitator
Grade Sheet

Group Members:

Topic/Question:

Score the group’s performance in today’s seminar using the following criteria:

4-Excellent 3-Good 2-Poor 1- Unsatisfactory

_____ The group used the text as a reference throughout the Socratic Seminar.

_____ Group members shared in the discussion of the topic.

_____ The group asked in-depth questions.

_____ Everyone in the group was respectful of other ideas.

_____ The group was able to take the Socratic Seminar to a high level of understanding.

SOCRATIC SEMINAR
Grading Rubric

A
• clarifies for a better understanding
• encourages others to participate
• relates to another person or idea
• asks questions
• is an active participant

B
• relates to another person or idea
• asks questions
• is an active participant

C
• one comment made
• listens
• takes notes

D
• listens
• takes notes

F
• is not participating

SOCRATIC SEMINAR
Grading Rubric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| A = Exemplary | demonstrates patience with others’ opinions  
| | moves the conversation forward  
| | speaks to all participants  
| | thinks before answering  
| | refers directly to the text  
| | makes connections to other speakers  
| | considers all opinions  
| | writes down thoughts and questions  
| | builds on others’ comments  
| | asks for clarification when needed  
| | identifies key words/phrases/details in the text |
| B = Commanding | comments often  
| | responds to questions  
| | refers to text  
| | offers interesting ideas  
| | pays attention  
| | a few questions  
| | takes notes |
| C = Competent | emphasizes only own ideas  
| | ideas not always connected  
| | refers to text  
| | loses track of conversation  
| | judges others’ ideas  
| | a few questions  
| | takes some notes |
| D = Developing | leans toward debate, not dialogue  
| | disruptive, argumentative  
| | mumbles or is silent  
| | repeats same ideas  
| | little to no notes taken  
| | no questions asked |
| F = Emerging | is not participating  
| | is lost/overwhelmed with the seminar |