

TEACHER DIRECTIONS

Socratic Seminar

CCSS: RI.9-10.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.3, SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.6, RI.11-12.1, SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.6

Socratic Seminar is an inquiry-driven discussion in which students examine issues and respond to open-ended questions about the themes and topics in a text. Using dialogue rather than debate to communicate, students listen attentively and respond civilly. But, they are also expected to think critically and make persuasive claims and counterclaims.

Socratic seminars can be structured in different ways, yet the purpose remains the same: to gain a deeper understanding of the ideas in a text. Named in homage to the Greek philosopher Socrates, this strategy reflects the belief that there is intrinsic value in inquiry.

1. Have students bring their copies of the excerpt to the discussion, along with the notes they took while reading.
2. Divide the class into teams of three to five students.
3. Give each group a list of five text-dependent questions, either from the bank of those provided in the lesson or ones you created on your own.
4. Provide each student with a capture sheet to record the ideas from the small-group discussion. Instruct groups to discuss each question on the list and individually record their responses and any supporting evidence from the excerpt.
5. Next, instruct groups to generate one critical question of their own to follow-up each of the text-dependent questions on the list.
6. Begin the seminar once small-group discussions have ended. Place as many chairs as there are teams in a circle in the center of the room. Instruct each team to send a representative to the center.
7. Once the representatives are seated, allow students to drive the discussion. A “talking piece,” like a ball or stick, can be used to designate the representative whose turn it is to speak.
8. Students in the center address the list of questions and pose new critical questions they generated in each of their small groups. Students should respond to all presented views by evaluating each other’s claims, reasoning and evidence to determine if they agree and to ask further questions.

9. Students outside the center should take notes on the discussion. All students should have the excerpt in front of them and refer back to it appropriately, drawing attention to specific pages and passages.
10. Facilitate the discussion by reminding students of the Socratic Seminar Guidelines. Remind students when to clarify and elaborate on their statements or when important viewpoints have been overlooked.
11. Close by having students summarize the discussion. Ask what they learned and how they better understand the excerpt after discussing it with their peers. Finally, ask them to return to their small groups and discuss what could be improved in the next Socratic Seminar.

Note: It is unlikely that everyone will have a chance to sit in the center circle. Move around the room during small-group discussions to see that everyone participates. During the seminar, a team member can tap out his/her representative and switch places. You may require that each team tap someone out at least once and give extra points to teams who put up every member.

English language learners: This higher-order strategy works best with English language learners who have high-intermediate to advanced fluency. To ensure these students have an opportunity to participate during the Socratic Seminar, provide every student with an equal number of talking chips. Students must give up a chip each time they speak.



Socratic Seminar Guidelines

Behaviors to demonstrate during the Socratic Seminar

- Make a unique claim, using evidence from the text.
- State a possible counterclaim and refute it, using evidence from the text.
- Paraphrase a classmate's claim.
- Use appropriate and respectful language.

Sentence Starters to use during the Socratic Seminar

To share a claim or refute a possible counterclaim

- While some people believe _____, I think _____.
- Based on _____, I have come to the conclusion that _____.
- There is ample evidence to suggest that _____.

To disagree with or refute a classmate's claim

- I respect what you claim about _____, however, the text states _____, so I believe _____.
- You propose that _____; I'm going to have to disagree for the following reasons _____.
- You make a solid point about _____, but the other side of it is _____.

To build on or paraphrase a classmate's claim

- So, what you're saying is _____.
- I have also experienced what you describe when you claim that _____.
- What you said about _____ made me think of _____.
- That was a great point because _____.
- I agree with your argument there because _____.
- That's a fascinating point. It connects to what I was thinking about _____.