

# AVID 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" (10 pts)
2. Fill out the Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet (10 pts)
3. Fill out the Socratic Seminar Questions Worksheet (10 pts)

## **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. (30 pts)
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. (20 pts)

## **AFTER SOCRATIC SEMINAR**

1. Socratic Seminar Debrief (10 pts)
2. Socratic Reflective Writing (10 pts)

Underlined papers must be stapled and turned in (in the order above). **(100 pts total)**

# 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 Preparation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Article/Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Reading and Understanding

A. Read the prompt/article individually.

B. Highlight or underline at least one main idea per paragraph. Summarize main points below:

Paragraph #1:

Paragraph #2:

Paragraph #3:

Paragraph #4:

Paragraph #5:

Paragraph #6:

Paragraph #7:

Paragraph #8:

Paragraph #9:

Paragraph #10:

C. Circle or Highlight any unfamiliar words or phrases. Write them down below with definitions:

D. Summarize below the main points of the reading.

E. Write down a minimum of 6 questions about what you have read. (Use 2 level 1, 2, and 3's)

1. L1:

2. L1:

3. L2:

4. L2:

5. L3:

6. L3:

## AVID Socratic Seminar Questions

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

# 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?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Socratic Reflective Writing**

1. What is one thing you liked that you said?
2. What is one point someone else said that you agree with?
3. What was the most interesting question?
4. What was the most interesting idea to come from a participant?
5. What was the best thing that you observed?
6. What was the most troubling thing that you observed?
7. What do you think should be done differently in the next seminar?
8. As a Socratic Seminar participant, what area of the process will you work on for next time?
9. What new questions arose as a result of the discussion and debrief?