Socratic Seminar

Text Selection

Socratic Seminar focuses on deep discussion around a central text, so it is important that complex, rich texts are chosen that invite multiple interpretations and negotiation to arrive at meaning.

Consider the following list of sources to help you think about your text selection.

All Content Areas—Print Texts

philosophical treatises
songs (lyrics and instrumentals)
essays
articles (e.g. journals, magazines, current events, AVID Weekly, etc.)
editorials
political cartoons
policies (e.g. government, business, health, public)
workplace documents (e.g. contracts, instructions, manuals, etc.)
communication/public relations documents (e.g. flyers, posters, propaganda, etc.)

All Content Areas--Non-print Texts

photographs
art pieces
video clips

Mathematics

mathematical proofs
mathematical word problems
logic "arguments"
critical thinking puzzles
graphic and/or data information

Science

experimental designs or protocols
court/legal cases
professional organization bulletins (e.g. FDA, CDC, WHO, etc.)
medical practice guidelines
codes of ethics
environmental issues (e.g. policies, current events articles, journal articles, etc.)
primary source documents (e.g. Newton's laws, Galileo, Pythagoras)
articles from the web (e.g. sciencenews.org, nature.com, etc.)

Physical Education/Health

codes of ethics
professional organization bulletins (e.g. FDA, CDC, WHO, etc.)
medical practice guidelines
nutrition labels
fitness guidelines
dietary recommendations
weight-loss program descriptions
"playbook"—game strategies

Social Sciences

primary or secondary source documents
historical speeches (written or oral)
laws
edicts
treaties
historical literature
legislative bills
court/legal cases

Language Arts

primary or secondary source documents
historical speeches (written or oral)
poems
short stories
excerpts from novels
plays
author biographies/autobiographies

Visual and Performing Arts

performances (e.g. dance, play, monologue, musical, etc.)
art pieces
scripts
scores
art history texts
artist biographies/autobiographies
photographs
director, choreographer, conductor, animator notes (background information about the creative process)
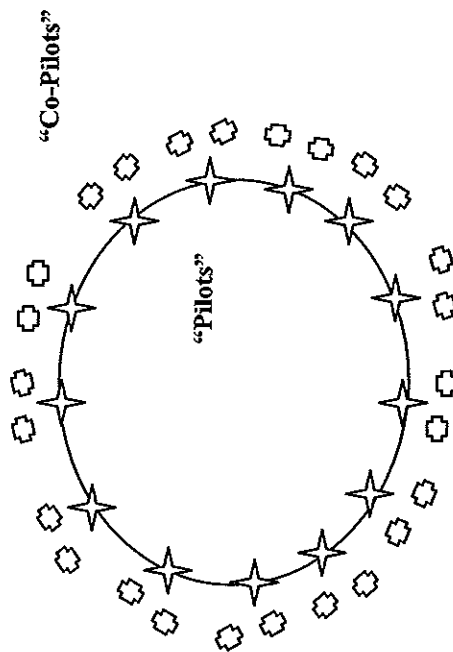
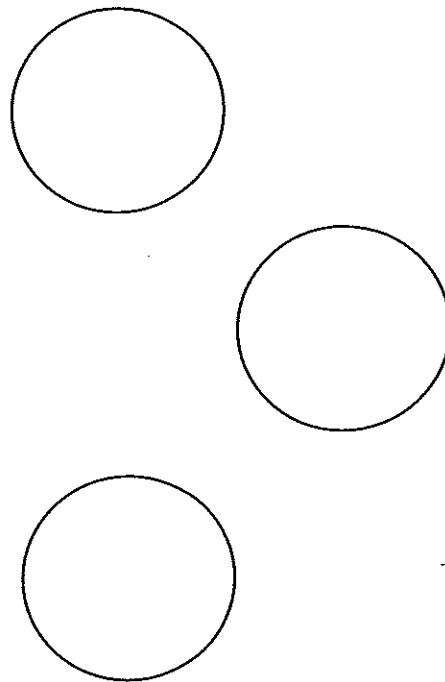# Socratic Seminar Sample Class Arrangements

One Large Seminar

Inner/Outer Circle or Fishbowl

Outer Circle

Inner Circle

Triad

"Co-Pilots"

"Pilots"
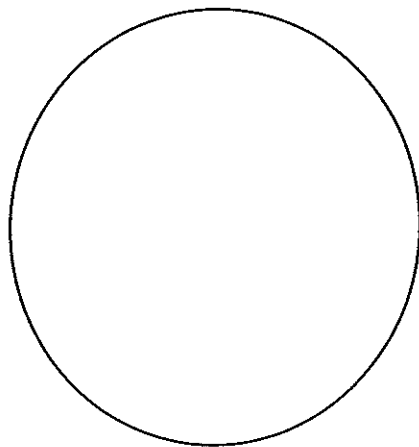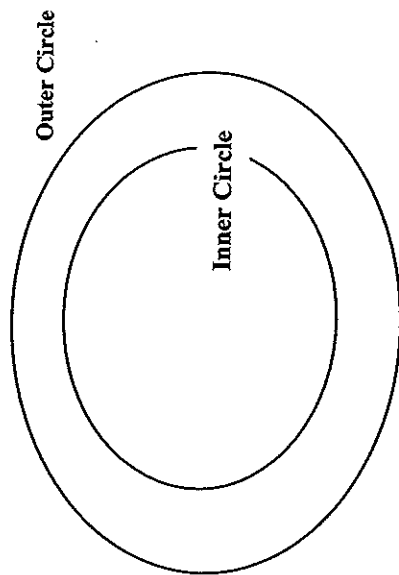
Simultaneous Seminars

Inner/Outer Circle or Fishbowl: Arrange students in inner and outer circles (a "fishbowl") where the inner circle engages in a dialogue and the outer circle observes, taking notes on the seminar process and new understandings about the text. The outer circle can share their observations as part of the debriefing process, with the teacher guiding how to offer constructive criticism rather than judgments. Students in the outer circle can keep track of comments/points made to which they would like to respond if the circles switch places or as part of the debrief. Members of the outside circle can also use the "Socratic Seminar Observation Checklist" or the "Socratic Seminar Observation Notes" form to monitor student participation in the inner circle. These tools provide structure for listening and give the outside students concrete details to use when they share observations in the debrief.

Triad: Arrange students so that each individual student in the inner circle (called a "pilot") has two "co-pilots" that sit behind and on either side of him/her. The pilot and two co-pilots form the triad. Pilots are in the inner circle and speak; co-pilots are in the outer circle and only speak during consult times. The seminar proceeds as normal, writing and sharing questions, discussion, etc. At a certain point during the discussion, the leader pauses the conversation and directs the triads to talk to each other. Sometimes they talk about something that is being discussed in the circle and needs more depth. Sometimes the triads talk about a question posed by the leader. Sometimes the leader asks the triads to come up with a new question or direction for the seminar--it just depends on how things are progressing in the seminar. Anytime the triads are speaking, they can move seats and one of the co-pilots can move into the pilot seat. But only during that time is switching seats allowed.

This variation is helpful because it gives students who may not yet have the courage to speak in a large group the chance to practice in a triad. It also involves the whole class, as opposed to the inner/outer circle which may not include all students speaking in one seminar sitting

Simultaneous Seminars: Arrange students in a few small group circles as far from one another as possible in the classroom (to cut down on noise interference from groups speaking at the same time). Adhering to all of the regular guidelines and expectations of Socratic Seminar, students engage in their small group dialogues. Simultaneous seminars are usually done with experienced students who are able to maintain their own discussions with minimal teacher assistance. This is an especially good structure to use if the teacher wants to engage the class in exploring multiple texts around a core topic or concept. Each small group might have a different text as the focus of their Socratic Seminar. This also creates the opportunity for a larger Socratic Seminar that then discusses how the texts resonate with one another.

SOCRATIC SEMINAR GUIDELINES

Before the Socratic Seminar

Read and prepare your text before the seminar using the critical reading process.

1. Make sure you understand your **purpose for reading**. Follow the teacher's reading prompt, if provided.

2. **Pre-read** by previewing the text and determining how it is structured, thinking about any background information you already know or you discussed in class, and noticing the questions you have before you read.

3. **Interact with the text** so you read it closely. This includes:
   - ☐ Marking the text:
       1. Number the paragraphs
       2. Circle key terms
       3. Underline important parts of the text that are connected to your purpose for reading
   - ☐ Making annotations and/or taking notes:
       1. Write notes in the margins or use sticky notes to write your thoughts and questions
       2. Use Cornell notes, a dialectical journal, or some other form of notetaking to keep track of your thoughts, paying close attention to noting passages/paragraph numbers, page numbers, etc. You want to easily reference the text.

4. **Extend beyond the text** by writing several open-ended, higher-level questions that have no single right answer and will encourage discussion. Areas to consider for questions:
   - o Ask "Why?" about the author's choices in the text, about a character's motivation, about a situation described in the text, etc.
   - o Ask about viewpoint or perspectives (realist, pessimist, optimist, etc.)
   - o Examine the title, or tone of the text, or connect to current issues, theme, etc.
   - o Ask, "If the author were alive today, how would s/he feel about...?"
   - o Ask questions that explore your own interpretation of the reading.
   - o Ask about importance: "So what . . . ?" "What does it matter that . . .?" "What does it mean that . . . ?"

During the Seminar

Use all of your close reading to participate in a discussion that helps you understand the text at a deeper level. Be ready to discuss the text like the scholar you are!

1. Be prepared to participate and ask good questions. The quality of the seminar is diminished when participants speak without preparation.

2. Show respect for differing ideas, thoughts, and values--no put-downs or sarcasm.

3. Allow each speaker enough time to begin and finish his or her thoughts—don't interrupt.

4. Involve others in the discussion, and ask others to elaborate on their responses (use "Academic Language Scripts for Socratic Seminar").

5. Build on what others say: ask questions to probe deeper, clarify, paraphrase and add, synthesize a variety of different views in your own summary. Examples:
   - **Ask questions to probe deeper:** "Juan makes me think of another point: why would the author include....?" or "Sonya, what makes you think that the author meant...?"
   - **Clarify:** "I think what Stephanie is trying to say is...." or "I'm not sure I understand what you are saying, Jeff. What is...."
   - **Paraphrase and add:** "What I think I heard Lupe say is that.... I agree with her and also think...." "While Tim is saying that ..., I think...."
   - **Synthesize:** "Based on the ideas from Tim, Shanequia, and Maya, it seems like we all think that the author is...."

6. Use your best active listening skills: nod, make eye contact, lean forward, provide feedback, and listen carefully to others.

7. Participate openly and keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities.

8. Refer to the text often, and give evidence and examples to support your response. Example: "The author has clearly stated in line 22 that..."

9. Discuss the ideas of the text, not each other's opinions or personal experiences.

10. Take notes about important points you want to remember or new questions you want to ask.

After the Seminar

Think about what you've learned as a result of participating in the Socratic seminar.

1. **Summarize:** Use writing to think about and **summarize the content** of the seminar, especially to capture new understandings of the text.
   Examples of Summary Questions/Prompts:
   - Based on this seminar, what are the most important points about this text?
   - How does my understanding of the text connect to other things I'm learning?
   - What major ideas do I better understand about this text after the seminar?
   - There are three main ideas I'm taking away from this seminar...

2. **Reflect:** Use writing to think about and **reflect on the process** of the seminar--both your contribution and the group's process.
   Examples of Reflection Questions/Prompts:
   - How did I contribute to this discussion—what did I add to it?
   - What questions do I now have as a result of this seminar?
   - Who helped move the dialogue forward? How?
   - At what point did the seminar lapse into debate/discussion rather than dialogue? How did the group handle this?
   - Did anyone dominate the conversation? How did the group handle this?
   - What would I like to do differently as a participant the next time I am in a seminar?

3. **Set Goals:** Be prepared to set goals for improvement in the next seminar.
   Examples of Goal-setting Questions/Prompts:
   - What will I do differently to make the next seminar better?
   - Two things I will do in the next seminar to be a more active listener....
   - To be better prepared for the seminar, I will do _____ with the text.

The Elements of Socratic Seminars

A good seminar consists of four interdependent elements: (1) the text, (2) the questions raised, (3) the seminar leader, and (4) the participants. A closer look at each of these elements helps explain the unique character of a Socratic Seminar.

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, photography, 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 Socratic Seminar, participants share with the leader the 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. Participants acquire good seminar behaviors through participating in seminars and reflecting on them afterward. After each seminar, the leader and participants discuss the experience and identify ways of improving the next seminar. Before each new seminar, the leader also offers coaching and practice in specific habits of mind that improve reading, thinking, and discussing. Eventually, when participants realize that the leader is not looking for the "right" answers but instead is encouraging them to think out loud and to openly exchange ideas, 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.

Tips for Teachers and Socratic Seminar Leaders

Leaders

- 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.

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

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

- Allow for "think" time. Pauses are OK; participants need time to think and process information and ideas.

- Model thoughtful behavior. Ask clarifying and probing questions if others seem stuck or are not asking for evidence, reasoning, or connections back to the text.

- Rephrase a question if participants seem confused by it (or ask another participant to rephrase it).

- Don't let sloppy thinking or gross misinterpretations go unexamined. Ask participants to offer textual support for their thinking or to consider what _____ would say about their interpretation.

- Encourage participants to use the text to support their responses.

- Pay attention to what is NOT being discussed. If there is a perspective that is not being represented, introduce it.

- Guide participants to discuss their differences and work through conflicts respectfully.

- Help participants work cooperatively, not competitively.

- Invite reluctant participants (keep this safe) while restraining more vocal members. Examples: "What do you think John meant by his remark? What did you take John to mean?" "Jane would you summarize in your own words what Richard has said? . . . . Richard, is that what you meant?"

- Avoid making eye contact with participants if they continually talk to you rather than the group.

- Strive for balance. Do not dominate the discussion or withdraw entirely; you are a participant too.

Teachers

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

- It is the goal of Socratic Seminar that it is student-led and teacher-monitored, which means the teacher sits outside the seminar circle. There are times, however, when a teacher may elect to be a participant or a leader in order to model key behaviors or to genuinely engage in dialogue about the text with students. Be mindful that having the teacher in the circle can change the dynamic of the discussion.

- At the start of each seminar, set the stage. Review the guidelines of the seminar but don't deliver a lecture.

- Take notes during the seminar: evaluate students, chronicle main ideas discussed, etc. Use the notes during the debrief, to help coach individual students, and to help students set goals for the next seminar.

- 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 print and non-print texts: arguments, proofs, fiction, essays, poetry, quotations, artwork, editorial cartoons, etc.   139

Developing Opening, Guiding, and Closing Questions

Seminar participants and leaders can use the ideas below to help develop questions appropriate to key stages of the Socratic seminar. Opening questions should get the seminar off to a start; guiding questions should help to examine deeper meanings in the text and to adjust the seminar if it is getting off track; and closing questions should help the group bring the seminar to a close, though not necessarily to a conclusion. Use the template on the following page to record questions in preparation for the seminar.

Opening Questions	
Description	**Examples**
• Stem from context • Direct participants into the text • Elicit more than one-word responses • Are generally concrete questions	• What does this text ask us to do? • What is the theme of the reading? • What significance is this to _____? • What are the assumptions of this text? • Could the two main characters have switched places? Why or why not? • What might be some other good titles? • Is it better to be _____ or _____? • In recent times, what well-known people are like _____?
Guiding Questions	
Description	**Examples**
• Move participants deeper into the text and to examine the content of the text • Help participants examine their own thinking and encourage revision of ideas • Help participants examine the seminar dynamics to keep it/get it on the right track • May ask for the interpretation of a specific line or passage; often "how" or "why" questions • May ask for clarification • May probe for assumptions, reasons, other interpretations, etc. • Generally move the discussion into the abstract	• What other ideas have we learned about that might help us understand this text? • Why does the main character think _____? • How do you support that position from the text? • How does this idea connect to _____? • If _____ is true, then _____? • Can you define what you mean by _____? • Why do you say that? • What do we already know about _____? • How can you verify or disprove that assumption? • What would happen if_____? • Do you agree or disagree with his/her statement? Why? • What would be an example of _____? • What is another way to look at it? • How are your thoughts now different from your initial ideas? • What would you say to someone who said _____? • How are ____ and ____ similar? • Why is ____ important? • How can we move from debate back to dialogue? • Who has another perspective to offer that will help us re-energize the conversation?
Closing Questions	
Description	**Examples**
• Establish relevance • Connect to the real world • Relate to the lives of the participants • Are generally abstract	• What can we do with our understanding of this text? • If you were writing this work, what would the ending be? • How does this idea connect to _____? • Explain the consequences of the ideas in the text. • Predict/justify future developments.

Questions Planning Template

The quality of the learning in a Socratic seminar rests on the kinds of questions asked. Keep these guidelines in mind as you prepare questions below and as you think of additional questions while in the middle of the seminar:

- Be sure your questions are based on the text.
- Ask questions that are complex and require participants to think beyond what is directly stated in the text.
- Ask open-ended questions; don't ask YES/NO questions.
- Ask questions to which there are no right or wrong answers.
- Regularly ask "Why?" "How do you know?" and "Why is this important?" to help participants expand their thoughts and responses.
- Ask questions that require participants to explain their reasoning, their assumptions, and to examine possible misunderstandings.

Opening Questions	Guiding Questions	Closing Questions

Socratic Seminar as Dialogue vs. Debate

The best Socratic Seminars are those in which something new and unexpected is discovered. This happens when the seminar is approached as a joint search or exploration through dialogue rather than a defense of ideas.

Dialogue and Debate

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

Academic Language Scripts for Socratic Seminar

Clarifying

- Could you give us an example of that?
- I have a question about that: …?
- Could you please explain what _____ means?
- Would you mind repeating that?
- I'm not sure I understood that. Could you please give us another example?
- Would you mind going over the instructions for us again?
- So, do you mean . . . ?
- What did you mean when you said …?
- Are you sure that …?
- I think what _____ is trying to say is….
- Let me see if I understand you. Do you mean _____ or _____?
- Thank you for your comment. Can you cite for us where in the text you found your information?
- If I understand you correctly, you are saying…
- In other words…
- To summarize…
- One thing I am confused about is…
- Your main point is…

Probing for Higher Level Thinking

- What examples do you have of . . . ?
- Where in the text can we find…?
- I understand . . ., but I wonder about. . . .
- How does this idea connect to . . .?
- If_____ is true, then . . .?
- What would happen if . . .?
- Do you agree or disagree with his/her statement? Why?
- What is another way to look at it?
- How are ____ and _____ similar?
- Why is ____ important?
- How do you know that? Can you give an example?
- Is there another way to look at this?

Building on What Others Say

- I agree with what _____ said because . . . .

- You bring up an interesting point, and I also think . . . .

- That's an interesting idea. I wonder . . .? I think. . . . Do you think . . .?

- I thought about that also, and I'm wondering why . . .?

- I hadn't thought of that before. You make me wonder if . . . ? Do you think . . .?

- _____ said that. . . . I agree and also think. . . .

- Based on the ideas from _____, _____, and _____, it seems like we all think that...."
- That's an excellent point, and I would add...

Expressing an Opinion

- I think/believe/predict/imagine that . . . . What do you think?

- In my opinion . . . .

- It seems to me that . . . .

- Not everyone will agree with me, but . . . .

Interrupting

- Excuse me, but . . . . (I don't understand.)

- Sorry for interrupting, but . . . . (I missed what you said.)

- May I interrupt for a moment?

- May I add something here?

Disagreeing

- I don't really agree with you because . . . .

- I see it another way. I think . . . .

- My idea is slightly different from yours. I believe that . . . . I think that . . . .

- I have a different interpretation than you. . . .

Inviting Others into the Dialogue

- Does anyone agree/disagree?

- What gaps do you see in my reasoning?

- What different conclusions do you have?

- _____ (name), what do you think?

- I wonder what _____ thinks?

- Who has another idea/question/interpretation?

- _____ (name), what did you understand about what _____ said?

- We haven't heard from many people in the group. Could someone new offer an idea or question?

Offering a Suggestion/Redirecting the Seminar

- I'm not seeing the connection to the text. Could you point out what and where that connection is?
- Let's remember that our goal is a flow of questions and comments and ideas to be shared rather than a debate to be won. How could your comment be rephrased to reflect our goal?
- Maybe you/we could . . . .
- Here's something we/you might try: . . .
- What if we . . . ?

- We seem to be having a debate instead of a dialogue, can we . . . ?
- Who has another perspective to offer that will help us re-focus the conversation?
- Let's look at page _____ and see what we think about. . . .

Socratic Seminar
Troubleshooting Guide

1. *The class has 35 students. How can they all participate?*
   - ☑ **Inner/outer circle or fishbowl:** Split the class in half and use an inner and outer circle (fishbowl) variation. Rotate these groups at pre-set intervals.
   - ☑ **Triads:** Use the triad variation where the inside circle is the "pilot" and two "co-pilots" sit outside the circle as consultants.
   - ☑ **Hot seat:** Establish a "hot seat" in the inner circle. This will allow those who do not originally volunteer for the inner circle to jump in, participate, and then step back out.
   - ☑ **Separate activities:** Split the class in half with two separate activities, one in seminar, the other in another quiet, focused activity. Later in the class period or the next day, student groups switch activities.
   - ☑ **Simultaneous seminars:** Once the class is proficient at seminars, conduct two or three separate groups simultaneously, with students leading/moderating.

2. *How can students see the difference between a Socratic Seminar and a typical teacher-directed classroom discussion?*
   - ☑ **Student led:** Rather than the teacher asking all the questions and the students attempting to give correct answers, students should be encouraged to ask the questions of each other. Students should become the seminar leaders.
   - ☑ **Deeper questions:** As often as possible, questions should be **why** questions rather than **what happened** questions.
   - ☑ **Conversational competence:** Encourage students to **listen** carefully to what others say, and **add** to their comments rather than look to refute them, ignore them, or wait for the teacher's "correct" answer.
   - ☑ **Academic conversation:** Have students reiterate what was said before responding to a comment. For example, "I heard you say ... , but I found ...". This allows for acknowledgement of other's opinions and differences.
   - ☑ **Teacher/student roles:** Establish that teacher and students are **co-learners** in the seminar.

3. *What kind of classroom environment is needed for Socratic seminars to flourish?*
   - ☑ **Trust:** Students need to feel safe in the classroom. They need to know that everyone—student and teacher—takes responsibility for their words and actions, and respects one another. Work to build this from the first day of school by making sure students know and use each other's names, learn about each other's lives and ideas while learning about the content, and have opportunities to take risks in the classroom (speaking in class, offering original ideas, etc.)
   - ☑ **Authentic inquiry:** Foster a sense of curiosity in the classroom by engaging students in the real unanswered questions of the subject area and using students' questions to inform and guide lessons. Ask authentic open-ended questions that require students to use their growing knowledge of a subject to seek answers and to negotiate meaning. Teach students how to create and use high level questions.

4. *Some students want to dominate the conversation. How can everyone have an equal voice?*
   - ☑ **Seminar guidelines:** Remind students before the seminar begins that they are there to listen as well as to speak. Review how to listen actively and what the purpose of careful listening is.
   - ☑ **Don't assess quantity:** Steer clear of assessing students by virtue of the number of times they speak. This promotes the idea that the goal of the dialogue is quantity vs. quality.

☑ **Advocacy:** Teach students what to say (respectfully) if they are ___ ing "run over" by another student and how to self-advocate.

☑ **Outside observers:** Create a small group of student observers (perhaps the ones who want to dominate) who will sit outside the circle as observers and remain silent until such time as they are asked to evaluate the flow of the seminar.

☑ **Taking turns:** Have the students pass a beanbag or other object. Whoever is holding the beanbag is the only one allowed to speak. This is a great opportunity to teach students how to restrain themselves and make notes on what they would like to say when they have their opportunity.

☑ **Red card/green card:** Allocate one red card and one green card to each student before starting the seminar. At the beginning of the seminar all students place their green cards showing on their desks indicating they are ready to speak. Once a student speaks, he/she puts the red card on top of the desk (taking away or covering the green card) and leaves it out until all students (or a designated number of students) have red cards showing, indicating that all students (or the designated number) have had a chance to speak. This can occur for another round, if needed, but the dialogue may be ready to continue more authentically and without the need for red/green cards.

☑ **Tokens:** Allocate a specific number of tokens to each student before starting the seminar. Each time a student speaks, s/he relinquishes a token. Once the tokens are gone, the student remains a focused, quiet listener. This encourages students to weigh the importance of what they want to say before they "spend" a token.

5. *How can especially quiet students or those reluctant to speak be brought into the dialogue?*

☑ **Scaffold reading and questions:** Ensure that all students are able to read the text closely and generate their own questions. Offer individual guidance for students who need hel__ generating open-ended questions for dialogue. For students with low confidence or fear of public speaking, the teacher might provide some "stock" questions for students to use as models/practice.

☑ **Seminar protocol:** Have ever___ ___dent read their question aloud b___ore starting the dialogue; this gives everyone a safe chance to speak--it doesn't require unrehea___ speaking. After spe___ ___g once, it's easier to speak a second time.

☑ **Pre-seminar preparation and rehearsal:** Invite reluctant speakers to develop several observations/insights to some pre-determined teacher questions and then have them practice responding aloud to the questions with another partner in class or with the teacher. Use some of these pre-determined questions in the Socratic seminar, making sure the targeted students know which questions to expect so they can offer their practiced answers before others jump into conversation.

☑ **Silent coaching:** Using sticky notes, write comments to students during the seminar, delivering them without interrupting the seminar. Comments can encourage individuals to speak, praise a particular behavior that pushes the dialogue further, remind students who dominate to invite others to speak instead, etc. It's a form of "silent" coaching.

6. *What if the quality of the questions is not provoking thoughtful dialogue?*

☑ **Question review:** Prior to the seminar, have students turn in their questions for review or have them swap with a partner to evaluate them and rewrite as necessary. During review/evaluation, ask questions such as:
   - Can the question be answered without reading the text? If so, discard.
   - If the question refers to a specific quotation from the text, does it give the page and paragraph/line number for quick ___erence during the seminar? If not, add those.
   - Does the question ask for facts? If so, rewrite so it moves beyond facts. You can't discuss facts, you can only state them. Use Costa's level 2 and 3 thinking to guide the new questions.
   - Is the question a YES/NO question? If so, rewrite so it is not.
   - Does the text provide enough information to discuss this question? If not, rewrite to be more connected to the text.

- Does the question ask for 'war stories' or personal experiences that may not add to the discussion of ideas, issues, or values? If so, rewrite to make it more text-related.
- Does the question elicit the most important ideas, values and issues in the text? If not, rewrite based on specific sections of the reading to help guide a focus toward main ideas.

☑ **Collaborative questions:** During the seminar, acknowledge what is happening and ask everyone to pause. Ask partners to work together to develop several questions that will help re-engage the conversation. Their new questions should be based on the current conversational thread, a specific part of the text, or on rewriting their original questions that might still be used in the dialogue.

7. *What if the dialogue stalls and no one is talking?*
   ☑ **Wait:** Resist the urge to jump in and fill the silence. Let the students look at each other and experience silence; often someone will fill in the gap with a question or another comment that jumpstarts the dialogue.
   ☑ **Guide the process:** If students continue to sit in silence, ask a question to help direct their next steps. Questions might include: "What can you do when your discussion has stalled?" "Who can help us get started again by posing a different question?" "Who can recap the last major point to remind us where we were?" "What part of the text have we not explored yet?" The goal of these questions is to prompt students to figure out how to continue a conversation; it is not an opportunity for the teacher to assume control of the discussion.
   ☑ **Wrap up:** Sometimes silence means that the dialogue really is exhausted. If that's the case, acknowledge it and coach students to pose a closing question to help wrap up more "officially" and then move to a summary and reflection debrief.

8. *What if the seminar is getting repetitive and/or staying at a superficial level of discussion?*
   ☑ **Guiding questions:** Acknowledge what is occurring and ask a question to help direct their next steps. Questions might include: "Who can offer a question that will take the discussion to a deeper level?" "What if the author were sitting in the circle with us; what would we ask him/her?" "What can we find in the text that offers us a different perspective?"
   ☑ **Pause:** Acknowledge what is happening and ask everyone to pause, review the text and their notes, highlight one idea or question from their notes/text that offers a new idea from what has already been discussed, and then do a one minute quickwrite thinking about this new idea/question. Ask for a volunteer to share their new thinking and to jumpstart the conversation.
   ☑ **Teachable moment:** If this is an early Socratic seminar with inexperienced students, offer a few guiding questions to prompt them forward and take notes about what they are able to do and what skills they still need. Wrap up the seminar and see if during the debrief any of the students identifies the shortcomings of the seminar. Share your observations and facilitate a class discussion about how to avoid repetition and superficial discussion. Set specific goals for the next seminar.

9. *What should be done about students who do not read the text?*
   ☑ **Alternate activity:** One of the main goals of Socratic seminar is close reading and analysis. Students who come in unprepared should be excluded from participation. They can be observers or can participate in some other related and meaningful activity that is completed individually and quietly. The incidence of this decreases once a climate has been created in class where people want to explore ideas and want to know what their peers think.

Socratic Seminar Observation Checklist

Your Name:_____ Partner's Name:_____

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

Speaks in the discussion

Makes eye contact with other speakers or as she/he speaks

Refers to the text

Asks a new or follow-up question

Responds to another speaker

Paraphrases and adds to another speaker's ideas

Encourages another participant to speak

Interrupts another speaker

Engages in side conversation

Dominates the conversation

AFTER the discussion: What is the most interesting thing your partner said?

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

Socratic Seminar Observation Notes

Name: _____

Directions: *Choose three participants in the seminar to observe. Write examples of the behaviors listed below as you see or hear them occur.*

Participant Name	Offers New Idea	Asks a Question	Refers to Text	Builds on Other's Idea	Distracting Behavior	Other Notes/Observations
1.						
2.						
3.						

150

Socratic Seminar Self-Assessment
Participant

Name:_____ Seminar Text:_____

Directions: Score your performance in today's seminar using the following criteria:
4 = Excellent   3 = Good   2 = Showing Progress   1 = Needs Improvement

_____ I read the text closely, marked the text, and took notes in advance.

_____ I came prepared with higher-level questions related to the text.

_____ I contributed several relevant comments.

_____ 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 built on another person's idea by restating, paraphrasing, or synthesizing.

_____ 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.

An area where I would like help:

Socratic Seminar Self-Assessment
Leader

Name:_____ Seminar Text:_____

Group
Members:_____

Directions: Score your performance in today's seminar using the following criteria:
4 = Excellent   3 = Good   2 = Showing Progress   1 = Needs Improvement

_____ I listened carefully and helped clear up confusion.

_____ I asked questions to clarify or probe for higher-level thinking.

_____ I helped the group get back on track if they strayed from the text or moved to

debate.

_____ I helped participants work together cooperatively.

_____ I did not dominate the conversation.

_____ I encouraged other participants to enter the conversation.

_____ I treated all other participants with dignity and respect.

_____ 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.

Overall Score (circle one):   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

Two goals I have for my leadership development:
1.

2.

An area where I would like help:

Socratic Seminar Rubric for Individual Participants

Name:_____ Seminar Text:_____

Exemplary
- reads closely, takes notes, and develops high-level questions before the seminar
- uses prepared text, notes, and questions to contribute to the dialogue
- moves the conversation forward
- asks for clarification when needed
- asks probing questions for higher-level thinking
- speaks to all participants and is heard clearly
- thinks before answering
- refers directly to the text
- makes connections to other speakers
- builds on others' comments
- considers all opinions
- writes down thoughts and questions
- listens actively
- demonstrates patience and respect toward others' opinions/ideas

Competent
- comes prepared with marked text, notes, and questions
- contributes to the dialogue
- responds to questions
- refers to text
- offers interesting ideas
- asks questions
- takes notes
- pays attention
- is respectful of others' ideas

Developing
- comes with some text preparation
- emphasizes own ideas; may lean toward debate rather than dialogue
- ideas not always connected
- refers to text
- repeats some ideas
- asks a few questions and/or questions are lower level
- takes some notes
- loses track of conversation
- judges others' ideas

Needs Improvement
- does not participate or participation is inappropriate
- repeats same ideas
- few or no notes taken
- no questions asked
- seems lost/overwhelmed with the seminar

Evaluating a Socratic Seminar as a Whole

Consider the following questions as you prepare to talk about the strengths of a seminar and the areas for growth.

Did the participants . . .

- ☐ seem prepared?
- ☐ speak loudly and clearly?
- ☐ cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- ☐ use the text to find support?
- ☐ build on each other's ideas?
- ☐ paraphrase accurately?
- ☐ ask for help to clear up confusion?
- ☐ ask higher-level questions to move the dialogue forward?
- ☐ stick with the subject?
- ☐ listen to others respectfully?
- ☐ talk to each other, not just the leader?
- ☐ encourage everyone's involvement and avoid dominating the conversation?
- ☐ avoid hostile exchanges and debate?
- ☐ question each other in a civil manner?

Did the leader . . .

- ☐ get participants engaged early? How?
- ☐ make sure that questions were understood?
- ☐ ask questions that led to further questions?
- ☐ draw out reasons and implications?
- ☐ keep attention on ideas in the text being discussed?
- ☐ question misreadings of the text?
- ☐ allow time (pauses) for thinking?
- ☐ draw in all participants?
- ☐ listen carefully to participants' statements?
- ☐ accept participants' answers without judgment?
- ☐ allow for discussion of disagreements?

Our class/seminar group demonstrated these major strengths:

Our class/seminar group can grow in the following ways:

Reflective Writing—The Learning Log

To get the most out of your classes, you should write about what you did, what you learned, and what questions you want more information about. This type of writing is an excellent way to prepare for exams and papers because it helps you use writing to discover and clarify ideas. These writings will also help you discover where your gaps might be in your learning—this gives you a chance to fill those gaps before you're held accountable for using it.

Here are some questions to give you ideas for your reflection:

- What did I learn in class today? How did I learn it?
- What was especially interesting about class today?
- What do I want to learn more about?
- What questions do I have now about this topic?
- What questions that I had were answered today?
- What surprised me about this material?
- How does this material connect to ideas or information I already know?
- Why is it important that I know this information? How can I use it?
- How would I explain to someone else how to do what I learned to do today?

You can also use open-ended statements to get your thinking (and writing) started. Here are some suggestions:

- An important activity I was involved in today was... and it affected my learning by...
- Something I'm still confused about is... because...
- One think I'd like to know (or think) more about is... because...
- I think my teacher had us do... because...
- I can relate what I learned today and what I learned in another class by... because...
- What I learned today will help me because...
- I was surprised to learn that... because...
- The video I watched related to the course in the following way... because...
- By taking today's test, I learned... because...
- The most important idea I got from the discussion was ... because... and I can use it to...
- One area I feel really confident about after today is ... because ...

A learning log is also a good place to identify reading or learning strategies that have proven to be effective for you and to think about how to transfer those strategies to new situations. Here are some starters:

- A reading strategy I used that helped me keep track of my thinking as I read was... It helped me by...I am going to use this again when...
- I know that to be an effective reader, I must...because... As I read..., I will use...to...
- As a learner, I need to...and these strategies help me: ... I can tell these strategies work when...