

Socratic Seminar

EXPECTATIONS

The Socratic Seminar is named after the Greek philosopher Socrates, who believed in the power of social learning and deliberate discussion. Socrates believed that humans learned best from questioning and discussion. He believed discussion helped individuals critically think through complex ideas and learn better than they could on their own. You can think of a Socratic Seminar as an “intellectual discussion,” but you can also see it as a conversation where you “think out loud” and “talk it out.” Essentially, it is a **student-led discussion over a text or big idea**. Instead of the teacher facilitating the discussion by asking questions, you will take charge of your own learning in this activity. It is a student-centered and social approach to learning, which means you have greater freedom, but also more responsibility. This means you and your peers must prepare for the seminar, or else the seminar will not work. Before the seminar, you will create questions, collect evidence, and prepare notes. The seminar will be as meaningful as you and your peers make it!

Focus Skills

Socratic Seminars require the use of many essential skills:

- Participating in collaborative discussions
- Analyzing multiple interpretations
- Analyzing themes
- Analyzing author's choices
- Analyzing literary structure
- Analyzing word choice
- Synthesizing texts and ideas
- Citing textual evidence

CHECKLIST

- Carefully read the text. Re-read parts, if necessary.
- THINK! Yes, this gets its own spot on the checklist. 😊
- Familiarize yourself with the question types/examples.
- Brainstorm questions.
- Find and select evidence.
- Prepare notes in response to your questions.
- Be ready to discuss!

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QUESTION TYPES

Real life QUESTION

A real life question connects the text to the real world. These questions ask for specific connections or pose an essential question to readers using a "What would you do" approach.

Big Ideas QUESTION

A big ideas questions address the "big ideas" of the text. Consider ideas, themes, and motifs. Then, ask a question that asks the author's message or purpose about those ideas. Usually, these questions begin with "What," but they could also ask "How" or "Why."

Open-Ended QUESTION

An open-ended question does not have a definitive answer. It requires insightful interpretation of the text. This is a question that different people would answer in different ways, with different pieces of evidence and different lenses of thinking. Usually, these questions start with "How" or "Why."

Literary Analysis QUESTION

A literary analysis question requires the examination of author's choices. Consider characters, plot, ideas, and structure. This question should ask why the author made a specific choice and what the impact/effect of the choice was. Usually, these questions start with "Why did [author] choose to..."

Quote Dissection QUESTION

A dissection question requires the analysis of an essential quote--but not one that is straightforward and easy to comprehend. The quote you choose should be "open to interpretation," with complex word choice. Usually, these questions start with "What does [author] mean by..."

Text to Text QUESTION

A text-to-text question encourages a comparison to a different text or idea studied in class. Think about a thematically relevant text. This could be a song, poem, article, etc. Whatever text you choose, you must select a key excerpt/quote that will serve as the basis for comparison, so that others can analyze the connections.



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QUESTION EXAMPLES

Real life **QUESTION**

Big Ideas **QUESTION**

Open-Ended **QUESTION**

literary Analysis **QUESTION**

Quote Dissection **QUESTION**

Text to Text **QUESTION**



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PREPARATION

Real life QUESTION

Adichie tells us that negative stories about Africans have flattened her experience and distorted the truth. How does Hollywood flatten the experience of traditional Hawaiian culture, and what can be done to make people's ideas about Hawaiian culture more complete?

If a surgeon recommended immediate gender reassignment surgery to your child who was born intersex, would you agree? Or would you try to make the case that not all humans have to be binary?

Big Ideas QUESTION

What are the positive aspects of first encounters between two different cultures?

How can an outsider's perspective lead to a more accurate view of a situation?

Open-Ended QUESTION

What effects do the cultures of the colonized have on the colonizers?

Considering what happened to Mary Rowlandson, would it be right to educate her about Indian culture to make her more sympathetic to the causes of the raids, or would it be too insensitive?

Literary Analysis QUESTION

In his epilogue to the audience, Prospero says that, without “art to enchant; /my ending is despair” and begs the audience to set him free. This is a very strange and complicated metaphor. What is he saying about art here, and why does the play end like this?

Both Ariel and Caliban are natives of the island who are forced to serve Prospero, a colonizer and an intruder. Why does Ariel seem to be happy to serve Prospero, while Caliban proudly rejects his authority?

Quote Dissection QUESTION

In the article *Intersex and Proud*, Yuhong Pang writes: “Usually the first assumption people may have after learning that a person raised a boy grew up to be a woman is that they are transgender, but the reality is sometimes more complicated than that...” What complications is the writer referring to? And how can learning about the differences/complications affect people in a positive way?

“I’ll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I’ll drown my book.” When Prospero is just on the verge of taking his revenge, he renounces his magical powers forever. Why must he bury his staff, and drown his book? These are strange and symbolical actions. What do they stand for?

Text to Text QUESTION

In Mary Rowlandson’s text, she refers to the Native Americans as “beasts” and “animals.” While it is true that they acted violently, that isn’t the whole picture. How does her narrow minded view of Indians compare to the narrow minded view of westerners about Africa according to Adichie?

In contrast to Mary Rowlandson’s experience, Olive Oatman seemed to have retained a positive impression of her time with the Natives. Both of them saw their families murdered in front of their eyes. To what can we attribute Oatman’s more positive experience?

Additional QUESTIONS

Type here.

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SELF-EVALUATION

For each category, rate yourself on a scale of 1-10. Then, explain and reflect upon your rating.

Discussion

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Did you ask or respond to many questions, ask follow-up questions, and move the discussion forward?

I responded to a few questions which I think moved the direction forward, but I feel as though I could have asked more than one question.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Analysis

Did you offer meaningful analysis of the text?

I referenced the text to help support my answers and relate to other people's questions. However, the text I referred to the most was the Pulitzer stories that not everyone has read so it may not have been as meaningful as I make it out to be.

What was the most meaningful, interesting question asked? Why?

I really liked the question about Prospero and Miranda's relationship. It's not something I would have thought about before and it helped me realize that single stories are everywhere, even in Shakespeare's writing.

Considering the seminar as a whole, how well do you think it went? Explain.

The seminar went really well. I liked how all our questions were different. It gave everyone equal opportunity to speak and develop their thoughts and it was a very thought provoking discussion.

Take note...

What will you do differently for the next Socratic Seminar? Explain.

In any future seminars, I want to speak more. I should also ask more questions, especially when the discussion slows down. When I have an answer, I'll make sure to speak because I noticed I held back sometimes during this socratic seminar.



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RUBRIC

	4	3	2	1
DISCUSSION	I ask or respond to many questions, ask follow-up questions, and move the discussion forward.	I ask or respond to questions, but may not ask follow-up questions and move the discussion forward.	I ask or respond to few questions.	I ask or respond to one question.
ANALYSIS	I offer meaningful analysis of the text.	I offer sufficient analysis of the text.	I offer limited analysis of the text.	I offer summary, rather than analysis.
HIGHER ORDER THINKING	I demonstrate higher-order thinking about the text and questions, going beyond what was taught.	I demonstrate higher-order thinking about the text and questions.	I demonstrate more lower-order thinking than higher-order thinking.	I demonstrate lower-order thinking.
TEXTUAL EVIDENCE	I refer directly to the text (quotes/page #s), meaningfully and purposefully.	I refer directly to the text (quotes/page #s). Evidence is not as strong as it could be.	I refer indirectly to the text (no quotes/page #s).	I rely more on my opinion than the text.
LISTENING	I show active listening throughout the entire seminar.	I show adequate listening.	I show some active listening but I am not consistent.	I show poor listening.

TOTAL: / 20 points

COMMENTS: