

# SOCRATIC SEMINAR

English 8



# WHAT IS A SOCRATIC SEMINAR?

- ⦿ A Socratic seminar is a **‘collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text.’**

*- The National Paideia Center, which has developed extensive material on using seminars in classrooms*

# WHY IS IT CALLED SOCRATIC SEMINAR?

- ◉ The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to fill their heads with the “right” answers.

# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SOCRATIC SEMINAR?

- ◉ The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to **achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text.**
- ◉ The group conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and discussion.

# WHAT HAPPENS?

- ◉ In a Socratic Seminar, the participants carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the discussion (not the teacher).
- ◉ The discussion is not about right answers; it is **not a debate**. Students are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful, manner.

# KEY ELEMENTS

There are three basic elements of a seminar/fishbowl discussion:

- ◉ **Text**
- ◉ **Classroom Environment**
- ◉ **Questions**

# KEY ELEMENT #1: TEXT

- ⦿ All participants read the text in advance.
- ⦿ Students are also expected to take **active reading notes** as they read the text. These notes will help them understand and connect to the text in preparation for the discussion.

# KEY ELEMENT #2: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

General classroom rules that need to be followed to make the seminar successful.

- ⦿ You must come to discussion prepared, with text read, notes taken and questions prepared, and all these materials readily available during discussion.



# KEY ELEMENT #2: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- ◉ Don't raise hands
- ◉ Listen carefully
- ◉ Address one another respectfully
- ◉ Address each other and not teacher
- ◉ Base any opinions on the text
- ◉ No side conversations
- ◉ Use sensitivity to take turns and not interrupt others
- ◉ Be courageous in presenting your own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence
- ◉ The classroom will be set up in an inner and outer circle.

# CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT NORMS CONT.

## Norms for inner circle participants:

- ◉ Students in the inner circle are those who are speaking.
- ◉ Inner circle participants are expected to discuss questions, share answers and opinions, and base these on their text, even pointing out portions of text to their peers in the inner circle.
- ◉ Participants in the inner circle may choose to add to their notes if they hear or learn anything helpful or interesting.
- ◉ All inner circle participants are strongly encouraged to speak at least once during each seminar.

# CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT NORMS CONT.

## Norms for outer circle participants:

- ◉ Student in outer circle are observing and taking notes, but are primarily silent.
- ◉ Students in outer circle may act as “wing men” and help a peer sitting in front of him or her in the inner circle by quietly passing them a note.
- ◉ A “hot seat” will be in place for a student in the outer circle to step forward and briefly become part of the inner circle if the inner circle seems “stuck” or that person feels like they have something very important to add to the conversation.
- ◉ Outer circle participants will add to their notes and record answers for discussion questions.

# CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT NORMS CONT.

## Norms for teacher

- ◉ Teacher will sit in outer circle and record observations, which will result in a **summative** assessment.
- ◉ Teacher will not **lead** discussion (or speak much for that matter).
- ◉ Teacher may re-direct discussion or clarify a possible answer, if necessary, or pose another question.
- ◉ Teacher may remind students of the rules.
- ◉ Teacher may share closing observations.

## KEY ELEMENT #3: QUESTIONS

- ◉ Questions will be prepared in advance that will guide the discussion.
- ◉ Students will be given these questions ahead of time and be expected to think about them and include them in their active reading notes.
- ◉ In preparation, students should seek to have answers to the questions, along with evidence (proof) from the story.
- ◉ Initially, the teacher may/will provide the questions, but students may eventually write the questions themselves.

# KEY ELEMENT #3: QUESTIONS

Here are some sample questions that you may be asked to be prepared to discuss when assigned reading and active reading notes:

- ◉ What is the main idea or underlying value in the text?
- ◉ What is the author's purpose or perspective?
- ◉ What does (a particular phrase) mean?
- ◉ What might be a good title for the text?
- ◉ What is the most important word/sentence/paragraph?

# KEY ELEMENT #3: QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you may hear the teacher ask during the discussion:

- ◉ Who has a different perspective?
- ◉ Who has not yet had a chance to speak?
- ◉ Where do you find evidence for that in the text?
- ◉ Can you clarify what you mean by that?
- ◉ How does that relate to what (someone else) said?
- ◉ Is there something in the text that is unclear to you?
- ◉ Has anyone changed their mind?

# KEY ELEMENT #3: QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you may hear the teacher ask at the end of the discussion:

- ◉ How do the ideas in the text relate to our lives? What do they mean for us personally?
- ◉ Why is this material important?
- ◉ Do you feel like you understand the text at a deeper level?
- ◉ Did you achieve your goals to participate?
- ◉ What was one thing you noticed about the seminar?



# ASSESSMENT

- ◉ Notes will be assessed as a **formative assessment**.
- ◉ Discussion will be assessed as a **summative assessment** according to the rubric on the next slide.

# AN EXAMPLE

- ⦿ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pGVR6ZF\\_2M&list=PL2Bc1IDY9g8M98Kynqz\\_p88nv-TI1Wjde&feature=player\\_detailpage](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pGVR6ZF_2M&list=PL2Bc1IDY9g8M98Kynqz_p88nv-TI1Wjde&feature=player_detailpage)

## FINAL THOUGHT

*“A Socratic discussion is a text-based discussion in which an individual sets their own interpretations of the text alongside those of other participants. The aim is a mutual search for a clearer, wider and deeper (‘enlarged’) understanding of the ideas, issues, and values in the text at hand. It is shared inquiry, not debate; there is no opponent save the perplexity all persons face when they try to understand something that is both difficult and important.”*

*– Walter Parker, PhD, University of Washington*