

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

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A SOCRATIC SEMINAR IS:

- **a genuine discussion**
- **meant to be a different kind of class (or instructional strategy).**
- **designed to enable students to explore a text, a problem, an experience;**
- **the students' opportunity to ask and consider questions and explore each others' answers.**
- **the students' opportunity and responsibility to develop habits and skills that are traditionally reserved for the teacher.**
- **a text- and student centered shared Inquiry and exchange of ideas**
- **an enlarging of understanding of BIG ideas, issues, and values**

A SOCRATIC SEMINAR IS NOT:



- **a more conversational form of teacher-led instruction**
- **training;**
- **interactive lecturing;**
- **canned student speaking (like ‘recitation.’)**
- **a debate nor a teacher led “class discussion”**

THE “KEY” IS THAT THE KEY AIM IS DIFFERENT

- **A key aim is to develop everyone’s understanding of the issues – not to be confused with “answering” the teacher’s questions.**
- **But it also aims at everyone’s self-understanding – through speaking, idea testing, listening, and reflection.**
- **The purpose is to ‘uncover’ not ‘cover’ a subject.**

DIFFERENCE FOR TEACHERS IS THAT THE TEACHER:

- **May have to learn and practice new habits.**
- **Becomes a mature co-colleague in the conversation (after providing some training and modeling).**
- **Must try self-consciously try to stop managing all the talk and leading students to an answer (This can be a challenge!).**

REFLECTING ON A SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Means asking yourself—

How did I contribute to the success or problems of the seminar?

How does this seminar compare to previous discussions?

IN ORDER FOR A SOCRATIC SEMINAR TO BE MOST SUCCESSFUL, PARTICIPANTS:

- Speak to the “commons”
- Detach egos from their own contributions
- Are able to advocate for both their own contributions AND for others’ contributions
- Are able to explore the assumptions of *their own* ideas without becoming defensive

“SUSPEND”



In other words, participants must “suspend” their ideas for enrichment and exploration by others.

“CIVIL DISCOURSE”



Socratic Seminars provide practice and application opportunities for civil discourse—a key skill for citizens in a democratic society.

SOCRATIC SEMINAR PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES THAT I USED:

- 1. Refer to the text during discussion**
- 2. It's OK to pass if you are not ready to contribute**
- 3. Participate only if prepared**
- 4. Seek clarity—if you are confused or lost the thread of the dialog, ask questions**
- 5. Only change discussion focus after sufficient wait-time and asking for the group's permission**

SOCRATIC SEMINAR PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES THAT I USED:

- 6. Take turns speaking, yield to speakers who have contributed less frequently; don't raise hands**
- 7. Listen carefully**
- 8. Use a volume audible to all**
- 9. Make eye contact with each other, not just the seminar leader**
- 10. Quality in, quality out**

A SOCRATIC SEMINAR ASKS PARTICIPANTS TO GIVE EACH OTHER

S

silence / wait-time

P

paraphrasing

A

accepting language

C

clarifying questions

E

evidence / examples

IN PRACTICE

Socratic Seminar Prep Work

Title of Piece to be discussed:
Author/Director:
Source info:

Issues, Ideas, and Values

Great/Interesting ideas Presented	Key Tone Words Associated with piece

Favorite/Most Important Quotations

1.	Justification
2.	Justification
3.	Justification

What is the Central Point the Author/Director is trying to make?

--

What is YOUR overall reaction to the piece? What new thoughts has it generated within you? What questions has it left you with?

--

Text:	Date:	Name:
Seminar Participation / Self-Evaluation		
I demonstrated the following seminar behaviors . . .	Evidence for these claims is . . . (from self or observing partner)	
S	Provided <u>silence</u> by waiting after other speakers finish, before voicing my own thoughts and yielding to others who have contributed less often when we step on each others' lines	
P	<u>Paraphrased</u> other speakers accurately to make sure I understood what they said	
A	Used <u>accepting</u> language, avoided slang terms and judging others' contributions	
C	Asked <u>clarifying</u> questions	
E	Explored for <u>evidence</u> and <u>examples</u> from this text, from other texts, or from relevant personal experience	

IN PRACTICE

1. Hand out and review seminar reflection sheet
2. Split class in 1/2 and assign 1 1/2 "Science" and the other 1/2 "Uncertainty"
3. Student close read and mark with post-it notes their assigned reading
4. As students finish reading and marking the text, they should complete the seminar reflection sheet sections "Pre-seminar thoughts" and "Contribution goals"
5. Explain that each seminar will run for 20 minutes and that each participant will have an observer on the outside
6. Arrange the desks into 2 concentric circles
7. Those participating in "Science" hand their seminar reflection sheet to their observer in the outer ring and bring their text to the inner ring
8. Facilitator remind participants of posted seminar norms (posters on walls)
9. Facilitator pose opening question (which observers will write in on seminar reflection sheet)

Opening ? for "Science"

"What assumptions underlie this text?"

OR

"About what are Heinrich and his father really arguing?"

Opening ? for "Uncertainty"

"How do you interpret the passage, 'The inscrutable, which includes us, seems patient of endless interpretation'?"

OR

"How justifiable is the claim that, 'secure knowledge can never be found'?"

Socratic Seminar Prep Work

Title of Pieces to be discussed:
Author

Issues, Ideas and Values

What did you like/not like about the books as a whole:	Questions you still have:

Linking Quotations

	Concept	Quote Evidence
(Similarities) They both effectively. .	1.	1.
<i>Catcher</i>	2.	2.
	3.	3.

	Concept	Quote Evidence
(Similarities) They both effectively. .	1.	1.
<i>Curious</i>	2.	2.
	3.	3.

IN PRACTICE

Uncivil Rites—the Cultural Rules of Anger, an excerpt from Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion by Carol Tavris

- 1) What is the relationship between anger and assertiveness?
- 2) How does the way anger is communicated make a difference in its impact?
- 3) What is the purpose of anger and to what extent is it necessary?

A Policy of Kindness, excerpted from a collection of the Dalai Lama's speeches called Kindness and Compassion, Sidney Piburn, Ed. Snow Lion Publications, 1990.

- 1) How does the Dalai Lama use reason to make a case for the superiority of one emotion over another?
- 2) What makes the argument for the superiority of kindness over anger necessary?
- 3) How is it that compassion (an emotion) can be a source of reason?
- 4) To what extent is reason responsible for emotional actions?

1-From *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* by Carol Tavris

and Reason -- an Eternal Ambivalence

hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.
Proverbs 7:9

have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those
a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

Protonomy 32:21 On the train to Brindavan a Swami sits beside a common man who asks him
he has attained self-mastery, as the name "Swami" implies.

," says the Swami.

ave you mastered anger?"

."

u mean to say that you have mastered anger?"

."

ean you can control your anger?"

ou do not feel anger."

ot."

the truth, Swami?"

silence the man asks again, "Do you really feel that you have controlled your anger?"

, as I told you," the Swami answers.

lo you mean to say, you never feel anger, even --"

re going on and on -- what do you want?" the Swami shouts. "Are you a fool? When I have

vami, this is anger. You have not mas --"

it I have," the Swami interrupts. "Have you not heard about the abused snake? Let me tell ;

ath that went by a village in Bengal, there lived a cobra who used to bite people on their w
o at the temple there. As the incidents increased, everyone became fearful, and many refus

RESOURCES TO HELP

The PortaPortal of Course!

www.portaportal.com/chrisclayton32