



wasatch range writing project
Adapted by Keeli Espinoza

Lesson Title: SAMPLE SOCRATIC SEMINAR: Examining an Informational Article

Burning Question: Can student generated discussion to enhance critical thinking for argument writing?

Objectives: This lesson will

- Support active, student-centered learning
- Facilitate inquiry-based learning
- Help students to construct knowledge
- Help students to develop problem-solving skills

Context:

Materials: Choose a text that promotes thinking and elicits debate – an appealing short story, informational text or a pair of contrasting primary documents, etc., paper, and pencil.

Time Span: 50 minutes - 60 minutes (Could be longer depending on discussion.)

Procedures:

ON BOARD: Draw a T-chart using labeling the sides either For / Against or Agree/ Disagree categories and create a question that the students are able discuss.

10-15 Minutes: Pre-Seminar

1. Prepare students for the task telling them ahead of time that they will be participating in a Socratic Seminar and that they will be using the chosen text to back up their thoughts and ideas about the text. They will need to be instructed to closely read the text by annotating and marking up by highlighting important pieces and writing questions or comments about what they have read.
2. Establish your role in the group as a facilitator starting when the Socratic seminar begins. This activity should be primarily student driven. Point out phrases on the board and explain how they are to be used: Ex. "I understand that you are saying... but I think the article shows..."
3. Distribute copies of the article and ask students to number the paragraphs.
4. Allow 5-7 minutes for silent reading observations (depending on length). Students may want to list observations in categories (agree or disagree/ for or against). I ask them to list at least 3 reasons for each side. While they are reading, ask students to annotate and markup the article by writing notes and underlining important ideas.

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Comment [1]: What is the context of this lesson? Who would you teach it to? What time of year: beginning, middle, or end? What prior knowledge will students need to know?

5. When they have finished reading, ask for student examples and list them on the board for each side of the T-chart.

6. Ask the students to pick a side (either for or against).

5-10 Minutes: Rules of engagement for Socratic Seminars Participants

- *Refer to the text when you need to* during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject" -- you are aiming at understanding ideas, issues and values.
- *It's okay to "pass"* when asked to contribute.
- *Do not participate if you are not prepared.* A seminar should not be a bull session.
- Do not stay confused; *ask for clarification.*
- *Stick to the point*; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
- Don't raise hands; *take turns.*
- *Speak up*, so that all can hear you.
- *Listen* carefully.
- *Talk to each other*, be respectful at all times.
- *You are responsible* for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.
- *Discuss ideas* rather than each other's opinions.
- *If you change your mind move*

15-20 Minutes: Seminar

Example opening question relating to the article: Would teachers and students perform better if they had more funding?

5 Minutes: Post-Seminar

Students will come up with his/ her final decision.

1. Distribute paper.
2. Write opinion: What was something that you heard from someone else that was powerful or thought provoking? If you changed your mind, what was the point that helped form your decision?

10 Minutes:

Sharing of Written Responses

Extensions:

1. For an argument writing piece, ask students to come up with the claim (thesis), warrant (reasons why the evidence supports the claim), and evidence.
2. Students can now take the additional information discussed in the seminar to focus their ideas into an argument piece of writing.

Rationale: Socratic seminars are named for their embodiment of Socrates' belief in the power of asking questions, prize inquiry over information and discussion over debate. Socratic seminars acknowledge the highly social nature of learning and align with the work of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Friere.

Elfie Israel succinctly defines Socratic seminars and implies their rich benefits for students:

The Socratic seminar is a formal discussion, based on a text, in which the leader asks open-ended questions. Within the context of the discussion, students listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. They learn to work cooperatively and to question intelligently and civilly.

Resources:

Copeland, Matt. "Socratic Circles." Stenhouse Publishers. 2005. Print.

Israel, Elfie. "Examining Multiple Perspectives in Literature." In *Inquiry and the Literary Text: Constructing Discussions in the English Classroom*. James Holden and John S. Schmit, eds. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.

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