

The Socratic Seminar for Elementary Schools

1. First Readings: Clarifying Questions

- Introduce the text: title, author, cover
- Explain that strong readers think of questions while they read a story.
- As you read through the story the first time, put a ? by any part of the story you don't understand or have a question (words, character motivation, parts of the story).
- During and after reading, pause and ask students to share questions and discuss as a group. As much as possible encourage students to answer each other's questions.

2. Second Reading: Taking Notes

- The teacher develops one or more open-ended question(s) that invites exploration of the story. Write the question(s) on the board.
- Ask the question(s) to the students and have them think about what their answer might be based on the first reading. Students can copy the question in their notebooks.
- Explain that now we'll read the story again. This time they should think about the big question and take any notes as they listen.
- After reading the story a second time, give students silent time to write possible answers to the question.

3. The Socratic Seminar

- Review the essential guidelines of the Socratic Seminar
 1. Look at the person speaking.
 2. Speak voluntarily at least twice.
 3. Talk to each other, not the teacher.
 4. Refer to the text.
- Remind students of the **open-ended question** that they took notes on in the second reading.
- Set a timer for the conversation and let the students own the discussion.
- Optional: Set up student observers with particular goals. For instance, a) create a map of the conversation; b) count how many times students speak; c) write down questions people ask; d) summarize the main ideas of the conversation.

4. Reflection`

- If the group used observers, ask them to first report out on what they saw.
- Review the essential guidelines and have the group of students evaluate how they did. Remind them not to refer to specific students but the group overall.

Other possible guidelines:

- Keep an open mind
- Use names when addressing other students
- One person speaks at a time
- No need to raise hands when talking—feel the right time to offer your ideas.
- Express agreement or disagreement in a thoughtful, curious manner

Adapted by Kurt Wootton from <https://www.paideia.org/socratic-seminar-plans/>