

Socratic Seminar Instructions

- 1) We will divide the class into two circles---a smaller, inner circle and a larger outer circle.
- 2) One “open” seat will also be provided for students in the outer circle who feel they have something significant to contribute. In order to access the “open” seat, simply leave the outer circle and join the inner one. You may stay as long as your topic is being addressed. Once it appears to have concluded, return to the outer circle.
- 3) You will all have the article we are discussing with you (both members of the inner and outer circle) as we discuss. You will also have a clean piece of paper on which to take notes/jot down ideas.

Rules: A Socratic seminar is a discussion and not a debate. In other words, we are not looking for a winner. In a Socratic seminar, every person in the room who is not speaking is expected to listen respectfully.

Inner circle participants may:

- ask for clarification if a person’s comment confuses you.
- add to a comment made by another person.
- voice an opposing viewpoint.

No one may:

- criticize anyone’s opinions, comments, or beliefs.
- interrupt when someone is speaking.
- respond in a manner that is in any way derogatory.

Before each class:

- 1) Read and answer the assigned questions for the article.
- 2) Formulate and write down 4-5 discussion questions based upon the assigned reading.

During class:

Students in the inner circle

- 1) Listen to the introduction by the designated discussion leader and consider the discussion question(s) or issue(s) he or she raises. For the first seminar, this will be your teacher.
- 2) Discuss and take notes on the issues raised, keeping to the subject of the readings, attempting to analyze, criticize, and connect.
- 3) Analyze the readings to gain a deeper understanding of difficult concepts, examples, the author's position, and the author's arguments.
- 4) Criticize the readings, articulating and defending personal opinions about the adequacy of the author's presentation and arguments.

- 5) Connect the issues you have analyzed and criticized to material of previous assignments in order to discern broader themes, similar concepts, and comparable or contrasting opinions.
- 6) As you participate, make good use of the text, at times calling attention to specific passages relevant to the issue at hand.
- 7) Direct your attention to other students and regard the teacher as a recording secretary on hand to take down information for use later in the course.
- 8) Take brief notes of points and examples that deepen your understanding; opinions that differ from your own; and arguments that you find helpful, convincing, or worth trying to refute.

Specific Responsibilities:

Inner Circle:

- You engage in discussion, actively participating but not dominating.
- You read aloud excerpts of the text to support or make a point, drawing our attention to
 - the words the author chose to use (diction).
 - Listen to each other carefully.
 - Look the speaker in the eye (eyes, shoulders, knees, toes!).
 - Do not interrupt.
 - Use each other's names: "What Amanda said reminded me of..."
- Paraphrase what the speaker before you said to respond responsibly. Support or refute the prior speaker's ideas.
- Stick to the text. Your point or opinion only matters if you can support your ideas.
- If you are confused about another's point, question her/him.
- Discuss ideas; do not attack people. It is the dialectic, the debate, that makes us all more informed. Changing your mind or adding to your understanding means that your mind was open. We all win, if we learn from our discussion.

Outer Circle:

- You are silent but "talking back" by taking notes.
- When do you think the inner circle "sparked?" How did that happen?
- Track the student you are assigned. Did he/she contribute well (neither dominate nor duck discussion)? Explain.
- To what idea were you dying to respond? What would you have said?
- What was the single most important idea that was discussed? Why?
- What was the single most important idea that didn't get discussed? Why?
- What could have made the discussion even more constructive?