



# Socratic Seminars

# What is a Socratic Seminar?

- A strategy to encourage students to engage in critical thinking, listening, and communicating
- A forum in which students determine the flow of classroom discussion and teachers serve as facilitators
- An atmosphere of intellectual engagement, cooperation, and conversation
- The goal is not only to answer questions, but to generate more questions

# The Vision

- Socrates believed that enabling students to *think for themselves* was more important than filling their heads with the *“right answers.”*
- Participants seek **deeper understanding** of complex ideas through rigorously thoughtful **dialogue**, rather than by memorizing bits of information.

## **Debate**

- Is oppositional
- One listens to counter arguments.
- Affirms participant's points of view.
- Defends assumptions as truth

## **Dialogue**

- Is collaborative
- One listens to find common ground
- Enlarges points of view
- Reveals assumptions for re-evaluation
- Creates an open-minded attitude

## **Debate**

- Defends thinking to show that it is right
- Calls for investing in one's beliefs
- One searches for weaknesses
- Rebuts contrary positions and may belittle others
- Debate assumes a single right answer
- Demands a conclusion

## **Dialogue**

- Expects other's reflections will improve their own thinking
- Temporarily suspending one's beliefs
- Searches for strengths
- Respects others and seeks not to alienate
- Assumes that cooperation can lead to greater understanding
- Remains open-ended

# Format

- The Group sits in a circle, allowing all participants to make eye contact
- Silence is not a negative.
- Discussion must flow on its own
- Mutual respect is key to a successful seminar
- One student speaks at a time
- Allow for post-seminar reflection time











# Student Responsibilities

- Being prepared for the seminar
- Directing the flow of the discussion within the seminar
- Determining the meaning of the seminar
- Constructing their own analysis of the seminar
- Utilizing critical thinking, listening, and communicating skills
- Respecting and honoring the opinions and voices of all other participants

# Seminar Rules

1. Listen carefully to your peers
2. Speak clearly - one person at a time
3. Participate openly
4. Value others opinions, but refer to text when defending your position
5. Avoid side conversations
6. Give others your respect and accept answers without judgment