

Socratic Seminar Guidelines

A Socratic Seminar is meant to be a place where you can talk and discuss a reading with your peers and gain a deeper understanding.

Seminar is not meant to test your knowledge of a certain reading but to help you better understand it. You are expected to come prepared for seminar by having read a text, viewed a video text, or finished an activity. You should bring any questions you may have (things you didn't understand or are curious to know how others felt) and ask those questions to one another during seminar.

As you go into the seminar, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text. To that end, it is important to refer to the text directly.
- It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute, but your participation is required.
- Participation includes listening and talking. Build on the ideas of others.
- Simple agreement or disagreement is not substantive participation. Your comments should lead the group into new thinking.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand something in the text or something one of your peers is saying.
- Stick to the point currently under discussion. Make notes if you have an idea you want to come back to.
- Take turns speaking. Allow others a chance to participate. Try not to dominate the conversation.
- Listen carefully.
- Address the group when you are speaking, not the facilitator.
- In the seminar, we agree to disagree. It is a discussion, not a debate.

Procedures:

1. Arrange chairs in a circle.
2. Review and discuss seminar guidelines.
3. Read text aloud as a group—twice.
4. Conduct a mini review or warm-up activity, which might include general questions that helps personalize a theme in the text.
5. Present opening question and maintain discussion: You can prepare more than one open question and consider ways to rephrase these. Don't be afraid of silence; remind participants that they, not you, are in control and should initiate the talking.
6. Conduct a short post-discussion analysis. Allow participants to analyze the mechanics of the discussion (e.g., participation, flow of thought) to find ways to improve the next seminar.

