

SOCRATIC SEMINARS: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High

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Agenda

What is Socratic Seminar?

Why do Socratic Seminar?

The Seminar Process

Facilitating the Inner Circle

Facilitating the Outer Circle

Assessments & Materials

Socratic Seminar in All Subject Areas

What is Socratic Seminar

- * A Seminar is a question-focused, student-dominated, and teacher facilitated discussion, concerning key ideas and texts
- * Named after Socrates, well-know for his open-ended dialogues
- * It can be as formal or informal as you want

How it works

- * A Socratic Seminar consists of two halves: an “inner circle” and “outer circle”
- * The inner circle asks and answers questions and discusses a text
- * The outer circle records information and takes notes on the inner circle’s progress

What is Socratic Seminar

- * Has a different purpose than direct instruction
 - * More student ownership
 - * Allows for sharing of interpretations and ideas
 - * Learning how to think out loud about a text

What a Seminar is NOT

- * A debate (competitive dialogue)
- * Rehearsed student speaking
- * A roundabout way of arriving at a teacher's prized understanding
- * A more lively and engaging teaching of content

How I introduced it to my students

- A “Socratic Seminar” is a student only discussion. You ask the questions, and you answer them.
- The purpose is to help each other understand the text. This is an opinion based discussion. This is NOT a debate. Because this is not a debate, you are encouraged to begin your sentences with “in my opinion,” “I think that,” or “What if.”
- You help each other to better understand the text by asking each other thoughtful questions. These questions should be designed to have others talk about them, not to stump your classmates.

How I introduced it to my students

- How is it different from a normal class period?
 - Organization of the room: in a circle- see and hear everyone
 - Students talk more freely and openly- don't raise your hand
 - Wait your turn to talk- wait time/silence is ok
 - No side conversation- listen to each other
 - More open, fun conversation
 - Eyes on whoever is talking
 - Stay on topic and answer/respond to each other
 - Get everyone involved
 - Talk loud enough for everyone to hear you
 - Its ok to "pass" or not contribute to one of the points

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WHY DO SOCRATIC SEMINAR?

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FACILITATING THE INNER CIRCLE

Facilitating the Inner Circle

Division of Groups

- * Groups should be unpredictable and as heterogeneous as possible
- * Have students switch up locations or who they sit by

Facilitating the Inner Circle

The Initial Question

- * A good question: based in opinion, focused on the meaning the writer is trying to convey, and has multiple answers that may conflict
- * The first question should be more specific with general follow-up questions
- * Plan three to five questions

Facilitating the Inner Circle

Keeping the discussion going and focused

* Break the habits of traditional discussions

- Sit within the inner circle
- Outer circle feedback

Facilitating the Inner Circle

Knowing what questions to ask

- * A well-placed teacher question can stimulate great dialogue; a poorly placed one can hinder dialogue and leave students feeling misinformed
 - Plan ten to fifteen
 - Use three types of questions: facts, interpretation, and evaluation

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FACILITATING THE OUTER CIRCLE

Facilitating the Outer Circle

Explaining their role

- * Police dramas: one-way mirror
- * Focus on behaviors and how ideas are presented
- * Focus on coaching an individual player
- * Visual distinction of the two circles (levels)

Facilitating the Outer Circle

Half-Time

- * Coaching minute- coach shares notes taken during the discussion with their individual player

Speaks in the discussion:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Looks at the person who is speaking:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Refers to the text:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Asks a new question:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Asks a clarifying questions:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Responds to another speaker:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Interrupts another speaker:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Engages in side conversation:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

DURING the discussion: What has your partner done well so far?

Facilitating the Outer Circle

Sharing whole group feedback

- * Ask students to share positive feedback or suggestions they have for the full group
- * Ways to start the conversation:
 - * Go around the circle and offer initial comments on inner circle discussion: maybe three strengths and one area for improvement
 - * Write their suggestion anonymously

Facilitating the Outer Circle

Ratings and Goals

- * Rate the quality of the inner circle's performance on a scale of one to ten: ask several students to give a one-sentence explanation of their rating.
- * Create a clear and specific goal to work on during their inner circle discussion

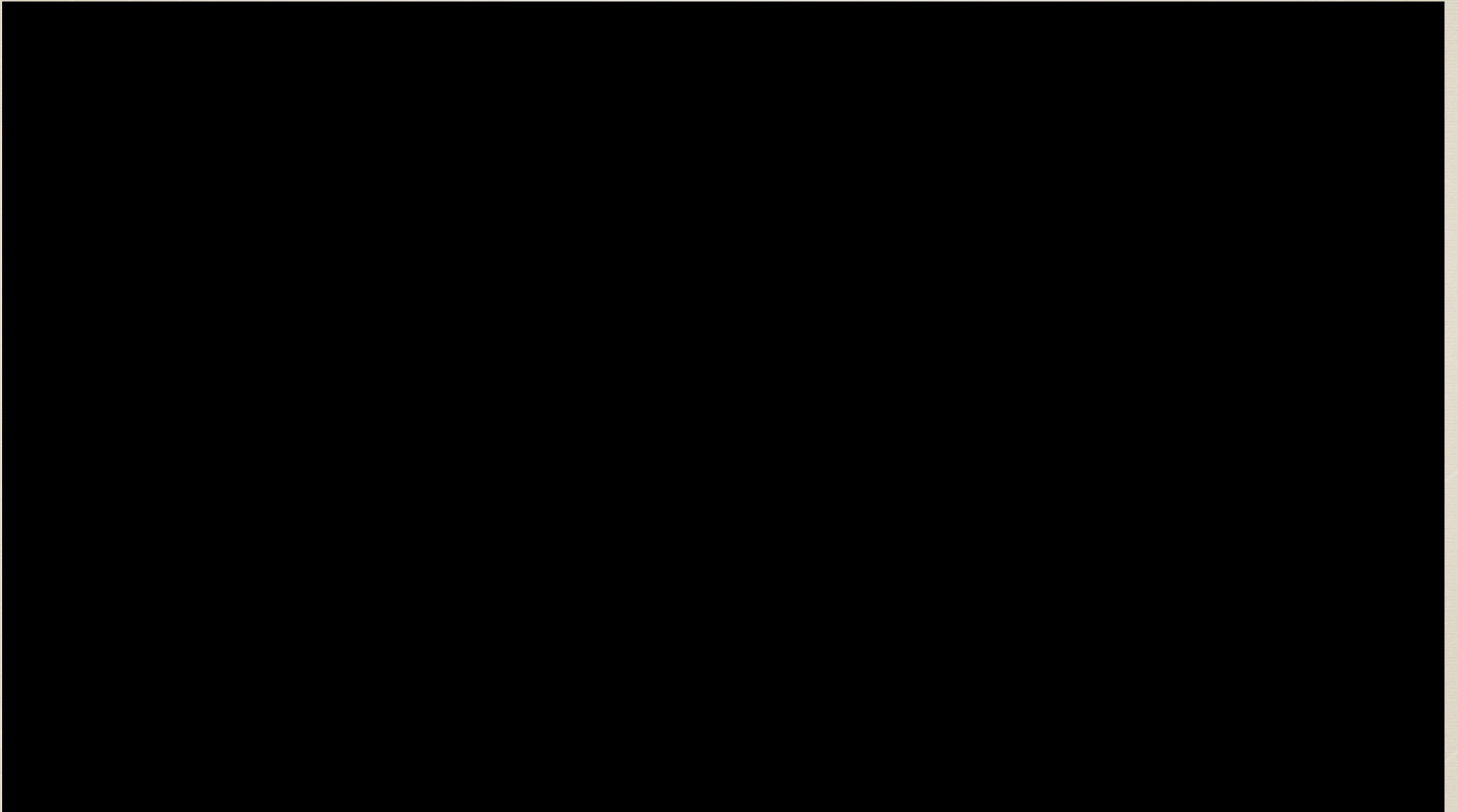


THE SEMINAR PROCESS

Video Notes

Teacher	Inner Circle	Outer Circle
Questions / Comments		

Day 1 Video



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ASSESSMENTS AND MATERIALS



SEMINAR IN ALL
SUBJECT AREAS

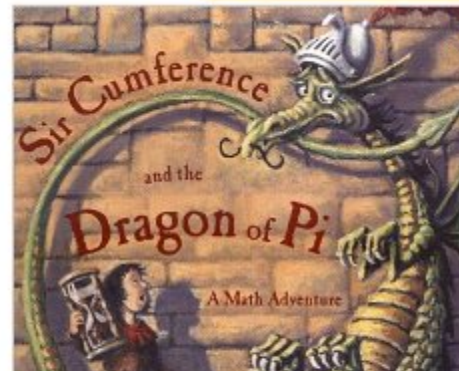
Why Use Socratic Seminar in All Subject Areas

- * It address literacy standards, reading strategies and questioning skills for your content area
- * It doesn't have to be a long seminar - it can just be a introduction activity to the lesson
- * It's about the text selection process

Math

- * Instead of: Taking notes to introduce a topic
- * Try: Read and discuss a children's story or current issue article to introduce a math concept
- * Instead of: Giving a test review guide and going over it as a full class with teacher providing answers
- * Try: Reviewing math concepts or questions students have before a test with students being the expert

Math



Name _____

Pre-Seminar Work: "Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi"

Directions: Read each of these questions. As much as possible, use evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. What was the author's purpose for writing this book? How do you know?
2. Who is the author's audience for this book? How do you know?
3. How would this book change if the author's audience would have been adults?
4. These are the names of some of the characters in this book. Complete the chart below.

Character Name	Corresponding Math Term	Definition of Math Term
Sir Cumference		
Radius		
Lady Di of Ameter		
Geo of Metry		
Sym of Metry		

5. Radius's cousin, Lady Fingers (Pinky), needs a math name. What math name would you give her and why?

Name _____

Pre-Seminar Work: "Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi"

6. What 3 character traits does Radius display in this book? (Remember to use examples from the text to support your answer.)
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. How does Radius use math to help his father?
8. Predict what would have happened if Radius had given his father the wrong dose of medicine.
9. Create one question you could ask someone about this book.

Science

- * Instead of: Giving a safety lecture & quiz
- * Try: Reading an article about examples of unsafe practices, discuss in S.S. and then create the safety rules as a class
- * Instead of: Lecturing on how human's activities cause changes in environments
- * Try: Using S.S. to investigate where environments have been changed and how we should help environments

Science


Socratic Seminar Lesson Plan-Grade 6 Environmental Science

Choose one or more of the following text(s):

- *A Perilous Beauty* (<http://butterflywebsite.com/farming/washpost.html>)
- *Baltimore Checkerspot Restoration Project Officially Launches at the Baltimore Zoo* (<http://users.sitestar.net/~jmfarron/Checkerspot.html>)
- *Orange, Black, and Rare All Over* (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/12/AR2006061201350.html>)
- *The Baltimore Checkerspot Restoration Project of Maryland* (<http://www.fairhillnature.org/BaltCkspotFactSheet.pdf>)
- Additional resources from subscription databases such as SIRS Discoverer on the Web, SIRS Knowledge Source, Thomson Gale's Student Resource Center, etc. as needed

Indicator(s): Recognize and explain how human activities can accelerate or magnify many naturally occurring changes.

Objective(s): Identify and describe how human activities produce changes in natural processes (Loss of habitat)
Participate in group discussions on scientific topics by restating or summarizing accurately what others have said, asking for clarification or elaboration, and expressing alternative positions

<p>Time Required: 45 minutes</p> <p>Materials: For the teacher: Socratic Seminar Record Sheet</p> <p>For each student: Copy of selected text(s) Rules for a Good Fishbowl Discussion Fishbowl Discussion: Overview</p> <p>For each participant: Teacher's Evaluation of Participant's Performance</p> <p>For each coach: Coach's Evaluation of Participant's Performance</p>	<p>Pre-Seminar Activities: Participants and coaches will meet for a pre-conference to discuss the participant's goals for the discussion.</p>	<p>Essential or Opening Question: What is the best way to protect the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly?</p> 
<p>Additional Questions: Why is it important to protect the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly? What are some of the reasons for the decline of the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly? What strategies can be used to protect the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each of these strategies? What factors must be considered when choosing a strategy to protect endangered or threatened species?</p>	<p>Post Seminar Activities: The teacher will thank students for their participation and summarize the main ideas and concepts examined during the discussion.</p> <p>Coaches provide feedback to the participants during a post-conference to acknowledge strengths and identify weaknesses.</p>	<p>Assessment Options: The teacher will evaluate participants and coaches using rubric provided.</p> <p>If time permits, students may write a paragraph or complete an exit ticket to explain what they learned from the seminar.</p>

Social Studies

- * Instead of: Looking at a concept or discussing a period of time from an outsider's lens
- * Try: Reading a text that puts the student into that context or ask the student to think about application today
- * Instead of: Explaining the three branches of the government and defining democracy
- * Try: Evaluating a President's opinion on the importance of democracy and the value of a democratic society

Social Studies

- Post on the board and then state the focus question **“Why does FDR feel democracy is vital to America’s past, present, and future?”**
- Give students time to think about the question, formulate ideas and respond.
- Remind students to refer to the text using the paragraph numbers so that classmates can follow along and respond appropriately.
- Let the discussion lead itself, but if it needs redirecting refer to the attached “Questions for Discussion”.
- Be sure to ask the following questions throughout the discussion
 - Where did you find that in the text?
 - How do you know that?
 - How does what “x” said relate to what “y” said?

Most vital to our present and our future is this experience of a democracy which successfully survived crisis at home; put away many evil things; built new structures on enduring lines; and, through it all, maintained the fact of its democracy. 11

For action has been taken within the three-way framework of the Constitution of the United States. The coordinate branches of the Government continue freely to function. The Bill of Rights remains inviolate. The freedom of elections is wholly maintained. Prophets of the downfall of American democracy have seen their dire predictions come to naught. 12

Democracy is not dying. 13

We know it because we have seen it revive—and grow. 14

We know it cannot die—because it is built on the unhampered initiative of individual men and women joined together in a common enterprise—an enterprise undertaken and carried through by the free expression of a free majority. 15

We know it because democracy alone, of all forms of government, enlists the full force of men's enlightened will. 16

We know it because democracy alone has constructed an unlimited civilization capable of infinite progress in the improvement of human life. 17

We know it because, if we look below the surface, we sense it still spreading on every continent—for it is the most humane, the most advanced, and in the end the most unconquerable of all forms of 18

Language Arts

- * Instead of: Analyzing a poem independently and annotating the text
- * Try: Using S.S. to hear multiple opinions and annotate together (way to also teach annotation)
- * Instead of: Giving students questions to check if they read or understand a novel
- * Try: Using S.S. to allow student to discuss their thoughts while they read

Language Arts

Socratic Seminar Preparation

Look your reading guide and pick 3 questions that could generate a good discussion. They should start with "What" "Why" or "How". Then make one general comment, connection, or prediction.

Chapter:	Focus: (Circle One)	Question/Comment
	What Why How	
	What Why How	
	What Why How	
	Comment Connection Prediction	

Suggested topics: British arriving, Hangings, Isabel's response to Ruth getting sold, The legal system (in response to Colonel Regan & the judge at her trial), The prison conditions & treatment of criminals, Branding

Electives

- * Instead of: Discussing a piece of art as a class, raising hands, and hearing from a selected group of students
- * Try: Using S.S. to preview a piece of art first and brainstorm their own thoughts before connecting with the author's thoughts
- * Try: Investigating a piece of art and discussing a potential title for the piece using evidence based arguments

Electives

SAMPLE SOCRATIC SEMINAR EXAMINING A PAINTING

[ON BOARD: "I see _____" "I observe . . .," "I notice . . ."]

30 Minutes: Pre-Seminar

1. Point out phrases on the board and explain how they are to be used.
2. Distribute copies of the painting.
3. 2-3 minutes for silent observations. Suggest to students that they may want to list observations.
4. "Round Robin" observing using phrases on the board.
5. List observations on chart paper.

10 Minutes: Biography of the Painter

30 Minutes: Seminar

Opening Question: What would be a good title for this painting?

30 Minutes: Post-Seminar

Give actual title.

1. Distribute paper.
2. Write opinion: Is this title appropriate? Support your answer.

10 Minutes: Sharing of Written Responses

Title of Seminar _____

Date _____ Class/Level _____

Main Concepts/Issues:

Preliminary Activities:

Seminar:

Opening:

Core:

Closing:

Post Activities:

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QUESTIONS?