

SOCRATIC SEMINAR GUIDELINES

Before the Socratic Seminar

Read and prepare your text before the seminar using the critical reading process.

1. Make sure you understand your **purpose for reading**. Follow the teacher’s reading prompt, if provided.
2. **Pre-read** by previewing the text and determining how it is structured, thinking about any background information you already know or you discussed in class, and noticing the questions you have before you read.
3. **Interact with the text** so you read it closely. This includes:
 - Marking the text:
 1. Number the paragraphs
 2. Circle key terms
 3. Underline important parts of the text that are connected to your purpose for reading
 - Making annotations and/or taking notes:
 1. Write notes in the margins or use sticky notes to write your thoughts and questions
 2. Use Cornell notes, a dialectical journal, or some other form of note-taking to keep track of your thoughts, paying close attention to noting passages/paragraph numbers, page numbers, etc. You want to easily reference the text.
4. **Extend beyond the text** by writing several open-ended, higher-level questions that have no single right answer and will encourage discussion. Areas to consider for questions:
 - Ask “Why?” about the author’s choices in the text, about a character’s motivation, about a situation described in the text, etc.
 - Ask about viewpoint or perspectives (realist, pessimist, optimist, etc.)
 - Examine the title, or tone of the text, or connect to current issues, theme, etc.
 - Ask, “If the author were alive today, how would s/he feel about...?”
 - Ask questions that explore your own interpretation of the reading.
 - Ask about importance: “So what . . . ?” “What does it matter that . . . ?” “What does it mean that . . . ?”

During the Seminar

Use all of your close reading to participate in a discussion that helps you understand the text at a deeper level. Be ready to discuss the text like the scholar you are!

1. Be prepared to participate and ask good questions. The quality of the seminar is diminished when participants speak without preparation.
2. Show respect for differing ideas, thoughts, and values--no put-downs or sarcasm.
3. Allow each speaker enough time to begin and finish his or her thoughts—don’t interrupt.



4. Involve others in the discussion, and ask others to elaborate on their responses (use “Academic Language Scripts for Socratic Seminar”).
5. Build on what others say: ask questions to probe deeper, clarify, paraphrase and add, synthesize a variety of different views in your own summary. Examples:
 - Ask questions to probe deeper:** “Juan makes me think of another point: why would the author include....?” or “Sonya, what makes you think that the author meant...?”
 - Clarify:** “I think what Stephanie is trying to say is....” or “I’m not sure I understand what you are saying, Jeff. What is....”
 - Paraphrase and add:** “What I think I heard Lupe say is that.... I agree with her and also think....” “While Tim is saying that ..., I think....”
 - Synthesize:** “Based on the ideas from Tim, Shanequia, and Maya, it seems like we all think that the author is....”
6. Use your best active listening skills: nod, make eye contact, lean forward, provide feedback, and listen carefully to others.
7. Participate openly and keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities.
8. Refer to the text often, and give evidence and examples to support your response. Example: “The author has clearly stated in line 22 that...”
9. Discuss the ideas of the text, not each other’s opinions or personal experiences.
10. Take notes about important points you want to remember or new questions you want to ask.

After the Seminar

Think about what you’ve learned as a result of participating in the Socratic seminar.

1. **Summarize:** Use writing to think about and **summarize the content** of the seminar, especially to capture new understandings of the text.
Examples of Summary Questions/Prompts:
 - Based on this seminar, what are the most important points about this text?
 - How does my understanding of the text connect to other things I’m learning?
 - What major ideas do I better understand about this text after the seminar?
 - There are three main ideas I’m taking away from this seminar...
2. **Reflect:** Use writing to think about and **reflect on the process** of the seminar--both your contribution and the group's process.
Examples of Reflection Questions/Prompts:
 - How did I contribute to this discussion—what did I add to it?
 - What questions do I now have as a result of this seminar?
 - Who helped move the dialogue forward? How?



- At what point did the seminar lapse into debate/discussion rather than dialogue? How did the group handle this?
- Did anyone dominate the conversation? How did the group handle this?
- What would I like to do differently as a participant the next time I am in a seminar?

3. **Set Goals:** Be prepared to set goals for improvement in the next seminar.

Examples of Goal-setting Questions/Prompts:

- What will I do differently to make the next seminar better?
- Two things I will do in the next seminar to be a more active listener....
- To be better prepared for the seminar, I will do _____ with the text.

