

## Socratic Seminar - Procedure

### Overview

Socrates taught through inquiry. In a modern Socratic Seminar, a teacher can pose an open-ended, overarching question, and then allow students to have a collaborative discussion using the questioning method with each other. This format gives students the opportunity to civilly analyze an issue as a team rather than debate it, and cause a needlessly adversarial situation. It is inherently collaborative and encourages students to explore multiple facets of difficult topics and acknowledge diverse perspectives, even if they don't agree with them. The method allows for more than two sides and thus dispels the problematic view that all things are a dichotomy.

### Activity Instruction

- **Setting the Stage:** Typically, students are expected to support their assertions in the discussion with textual evidence from the assigned reading and often have pages of notes in front of them. That said, the initial stimulus could be a film or a speech, or even an entire unit of study and can work in any subject area.
- **Room setup:** Arrange chairs in a circle so all can make eye contact with an extra 'hot seat' chair.
  - Many teachers use an inner and an outer circle of students with the inner circle being the speakers and the outer circle active listening. Some teachers pair students so that the outer circle student is a coach and sits right behind the inner circle student. A teacher could even assign an outer circle student to be the head investigator, looking up information for the team.
  - If you have a smaller group, you may choose to skip the outer circle. If you have a huge group, you may choose a fish bowl with just a handful of people in the center doing the discussion and the rest an audience responding in non-verbal ways.
  - The 'hot seat' is for outer circle students to ask a quick question of the inner circle.
  - The teacher's role is to interject only if communication breaks down: eg. to pose a new question or referee the student interaction. The teacher should sit outside of the discussion to avoid being overly engaged.
- **Socratic Seminar Guidelines to Review as a Group and Implement:**
  - Inquire and clarify, don't attack – you are on the same team
  - Take turns naturally – no need for hand raising
  - Monitor your own voice so you allow others to share as well
  - Back up your statements with evidence and identify your sources
  - Face the speaker when listening
  - Listen to understand, not just to respond
  - Invite all students into the conversation
- **Assessment:**
  - There are many rubrics available to choose from if you want to score the discussion itself
  - This can be a formative or a summative assessment
  - You can use a spider web diagram to map who speaks to whom or simply use a roster to mark who has spoken.