

What is a Socratic Seminar?



The Socratic Seminar is a process for examining texts and analyzing important questions that arise from them. Its name comes from Socrates, the 5th century BC Athenian philosopher whose approach to learning was based on asking thoughtful, probing questions of his students. In our classroom setting, this approach takes the form of a structured, graded dialogue between students, with the teacher facilitating but not contributing to the conversation.

The process we will follow is:

- 1. Students arrive having read and reflected on one or more common texts.*
- 2. The facilitator asks a question for the entire group to consider.*
- 3. One student offers a response, addressing the entire group.*
- 4. Students respond to these comments and offer their own ideas.*
- 5. The facilitator does not comment on the responses of students, but will periodically ask additional questions to refocus the discussion or introduce a new topic.*

The following ground rules are important to keep in mind as you prepare and participate in the Socratic Seminar:

- ~ Read and take notes on all the assigned texts, and bring them with you to the seminar.*
- ~ Talk to one another, not the facilitator.*
- ~ Don't interrupt.*
- ~ Try not to dominate the conversation; careful listening is as important as frequent speaking.*
- ~ Don't say anything that can't be supported with evidence from one or more of the assigned texts.*
- ~ If you agree with a previous speaker, do not simply express your agreement or repeat that person's point. Add more evidence to their argument or apply it to another text.*
- ~ If you disagree with a previous speaker, do so respectfully, using evidence from the texts to explain your reason for disagreement.*