Socratic Seminar
SOCRATIC SEMINAR

- INTRODUCTIONS
- SEATING CHARTS
- 25 MINUTE SEMINAR TODAY
- LOGISTICAL ENVIRONMENT
- EXERCISE IN CRITICAL LISTENING, CRITICAL THINKING, AND SOCRATIC DISCUSSION
SOCRATIC SEMINAR

• Teacher’s role
• Leader’s role
  – Quick Overview
  – Introduce the Questions
  – Facilitate the Seminar
  – Close the Questions
  – Quick Closure of Seminar
SOCRATIC SEMINAR

- Participants
  - Inner circle
  - Outer circle
    - Hot Seats
    - Feedback on Inner Circle & Leader

- FEEDBACK
  - Self-Assessment (Inner Circle)
  - Self-Assessment (Leaders)
HOW TO CRITICALLY LISTEN

• Be prepared
• Maintain eye contact with the LEADER
• Avoid emotional involvement – stay objective – avoid distractions
• Treat listening as a challenging mental task
• Stay active by asking questions
• Look for key points, cues and clues
• Use the gap between the rate of speech and your rate of thought
• Always keep the seminar positive
Socratic Seminars

Ground Rules

1. Speak so that all can hear you.
2. Listen closely.
3. Speak without raising hands.
4. Refer to the text.
Socratic Seminars

Ground Rules (continued)

5. Talk to each other, not just to the leader (no side conversations)

6. Ask for clarification. Don’t stay confused.

7. Invite and allow others to speak.

8. Consider all viewpoints and ideas.

9. Know that you are responsible for the quality of the seminar.
Socratic Seminar-Ground Rules Cont.

• 10. Address one another respectfully

• 11. Monitor “air time”

• 12. Use sensitivity to take turns and not interrupt others

• 13. Be courageous in presenting your own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence
25 minutes
24 minutes
23 minutes
22
minutes
21 minutes
20 minutes
19 minutes
18 minutes
17 minutes
16 minutes
15 minutes
14 minutes
13 minutes
12 minutes
11 minutes
10 minutes
9 minutes
8 minutes
7 minutes
6 minutes
5 minutes
4 minutes
3 minutes
2

minutes
1 minute
50 seconds
40 seconds
30 seconds
20 seconds
10 seconds
9 seconds
8 seconds
7 seconds
6 seconds
5 seconds
4 seconds
3 seconds
2 seconds
1 seconds
Any more Questions?
Indepth Look

Socratic Seminar
Benefits include:

• Time to engage in in-depth discussions, problem solving, and clarification of ideas
• Building a strong, collaborative culture
• Enhanced knowledge
• Increased success for all students
• Teaching respect for diverse ideas, people, and practices
• Creating a positive learning environment for all students
The Vision

- Socrates believed that enabling students to *think for themselves* was more important than filling their heads with "*right answers."*
What does *Socratic* mean?

Socratic comes from the name *Socrates*, a classical Greek philosopher who developed a Theory of Knowledge: the surest way to attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation... *dialectic*.
Dialectic means...

the art or practice of

examining opinions or ideas logically,

often by the method of

Question and Answer

so as to determine their validity.
How did Socrates use the dialectic?

He would begin with a discussion of the obvious aspects of any problem, feign ignorance about a subject, and try to draw out from the other person his fullest possible knowledge about it.
The Vision

- Participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas through rigorously thoughtful dialogue, rather than by memorizing bits of information.
What are Socratic Seminars?

- Highly motivating form of intellectual and scholarly discourse.
What are Socratic Seminars?

• Usually range from 30-50 minutes
  – An effective Socratic Seminar creates dialogue as opposed to debate.
Starting Dialogue

• **Asking questions** is the key!

• A STUDENT LEADER *prompts* the use of dialogue
  – Participants learn to be less attached to their ideas and less reliant on persuasion for influencing opinions.

• Dialogue is a skill of collaboration that enables groups to create collective thinking.
Starting Dialogue

• When groups begin to use dialogue with discussion, the two practices need to be **defined** and **differentiated**.

• The most productive discourse will flow back and forth from one to the other, from **inquiry** to **advocacy**.
Starting Dialogue

• **Students** must **risk** making mistakes in order to learn how to learn to think critically, and work collaboratively.

• **Professionals** **support** this risk-taking when they take their own risks in learning how to improve themselves as teachers.
Discussion in the dictionary is "a close examination of a subject with interchange of opinions, sometimes using argument, in an effort to reach an agreement."
Discussion & Dialogue

• Dialogue is "an interchange of ideas especially when open and frank and seeking mutual understanding."
  – It is a collective inquiry in which we suspend opinions, share openly, and think creatively about difficult issues.

Effective groups need to use both dialogue and discussion
What type of comments should I ask during the seminar?

- There are **three** levels of inner circle participation.
- You should come up with a *minimum* of 2 which will be tracked by facilitator and teacher.
Level 1 (Knowledge)

- Contribute to the discussion by bringing in **knowledge** as a means of demonstrating the ability to show understanding

- Add to the discussion by raising the comments to another question
Level II (Application)

Application means supporting not only your ideas with evidence, but adding to what others have to say.
Level III (Synthesis Questions)

Synthesis means combining or connecting two different elements of a discussion.

In terms of the Socratic Seminar you will be connecting two points with each other OR connecting a point made to the outside world examples.
Dialogue is NOT Debate!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is oppositional</td>
<td>• Is collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One listens to counter</td>
<td>• One listens to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arguments.</td>
<td>common ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affirms participant's</td>
<td>• Enlarges points of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>points of view.</td>
<td>view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defends assumptions as</td>
<td>• Reveals assumptions for re-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth</td>
<td>evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creates a close-minded</td>
<td>• Creates an open-minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude</td>
<td>attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Debate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Defends thinking to show that it is right.</td>
<td>• Expects other’s reflections will improve their own thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Calls for investing in one's beliefs.</td>
<td>• Temporarily suspending one's beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• One searches for weaknesses</td>
<td>• Searches for strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rebuts contrary positions and may belittle others</td>
<td>• Respects others and seeks not to alienate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Debate assumes a single right answer</td>
<td>• Assumes that cooperation can lead to greater understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demands a conclusion</td>
<td>• Remains open-ended</td>
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Four Elements

- An effective seminar consists of four interdependent elements:
  1. the SOURCE being considered
  2. the QUESTIONS raised
  3. the seminar LEADER, and
  4. the PARTICIPANTS
The Text

- A seminar text can be drawn from readings in news, history, social sciences, and philosophy or from works of art or music.
- Just about anything
Socratic Seminar texts are chosen for their richness in ideas, issues, and values, and their ability to stimulate extended, thoughtful dialogue.
The Question

• An opening question has no right answer
  – It reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the leader.

Should the United States government be the provider of the people’s healthcare?
The Question

- An effective opening question leads participants back to the text, or agreed upon knowledge, as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved.
  - Responses to the opening question generate new questions
  - The line of inquiry evolves on the spot rather than being predetermined by the leader.
The Leader

• Plays a **dual role** as leader and facilitator
  – Consciously **leads** a thoughtful exploration of the ideas in the text.
  – As a seminar **facilitator**, actively engages in the group's exploration of the topic at hand
The Leader

- Helps participants **clarify** their positions when arguments become confused
- Involves **reluctant participants** while **restraining** their more vocal peers
The Leader

- Must be **patient** enough to allow participants’ understandings to evolve
- Be willing to help participants explore **non-traditional insights** and unexpected interpretations
The Participants

- Share responsibility for the quality of the seminar.
- Most effective when participants:
  - study the text closely in advance
  - listen actively
  - Come prepared
The Participants

- Most effective when participants:
  - share their ideas and questions in response to others
  - search for evidence in the text to support their ideas
Designing the Best

- Seminars in which something **new** and **unexpected** is discovered.
- **Seminar is approached as a joint search.**
At the end of a successful Socratic Seminar, participants often leave with more questions than they brought with them.
Benefits include:

• Time to engage in *in-depth* discussions, problem solving, and clarification of ideas
• Building a strong, *collaborative* work culture
• **Enhanced knowledge** and research base
• **Increased success** for all students
• Teaching **respect** for diverse ideas, people, and practices
• Creating a **positive learning environment** for all students
Conducting a “Fishbowl”

- A strategy we will use when you have a LARGE class (over 20 students)
- Divide the class into “Inner” and “Outer” circles
Conducting a “Fishbowl”

- **Inner circle** = active participants; no more than 10 participants and 1 leader
- **Outer circle** = students observe 1-2 active participants for:
  - New ideas
  - Question asked
  - Referred to text
  - Offer 1 discussion at the inner circle
  - Positive comments
  - Negative Behavior
  - Side conversations
Observer Write-up

- What was the most interesting question?
- What was the most interesting idea to come from a participant?
- What was the best thing you observed?
- What was the most troubling thing you observed?
- What do you think should be done differently in the next seminar?
- What do you wish you had said?