

Introduction to Socratic Seminar

Introduction

The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent. The purpose of a Socratic seminar discussion is to build understanding within the group around an idea, piece of text, or a principal. Students are encouraged to engage each other in inquiry rather than wait for the teacher to enlighten you. This is not a competition for who is the wittiest but a work of collaboration. It requires that participants work to the benefit of each other to ensure we all gain understanding.

Expectations for Seminar Participants

1. Come to class ready to actively engage in the conversation. This means that you have completed the Research Outline and you have printed out a hard copy.
2. Only one person speaks at a time
3. Listen to each other and incorporate the previous speakers in your comment.
4. Allow everyone to engage in the discussion, do not begin a back and forth debate

Suggestions for Success

<i>When Agreeing</i>	<i>When Disagreeing</i>	<i>When Questioning</i>
"I agree with _____'s comment/idea/argument because..."	I disagree with _____'s comment/idea/argument because...	_____, what did you mean when you said...?
As _____ said....	_____'s previous comment is false/ridiculous/inaccurate	On what evidence do you support your belief on?
To build/piggyback on _____'s statement...	I would like to go back and challenge the statement/argument of _____.	How feasible is your plan?

1. Plan out your comment in your head before you say it
2. Take note of ideas and /or questions you get when you are listening to another comment to ensure you can incorporate them in your comment
3. Define ambiguous terms
4. Support your arguments with evidence
5. Ask clarifying questions of your peers

What is the difference between dialogue and debate?

- Dialogue is collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding. *Debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.*
- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground. *In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.*
- Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. *Debate defends assumptions as truth.*
- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. *Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.*
- In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it. *In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.*
- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. *Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.*
- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions. *In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.*
- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend. *Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.*
- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding. *Debate assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.*
- Dialogue remains open-ended. *Debate demands a conclusion.*