

The Socratic Seminar

This class seminar will give you the opportunity to test your analytical and discussion skills through oral debate. This seminar is carried on in a very structured way, so it is important to learn the process and the rules.

The Process

1. Before the seminar, the teacher will form the class into two or more groups. Your group will be assigned a question for you to consider and craft an individual response to before class. You will need at least a two-paragraph response to the question, well thought out and citing appropriate sources.
2. The teacher will arrange the classroom chairs into an inner circle and an outer circle. There will be one extra chair in the inner circle, so the inner circle will have one more chair than the outer circle.
3. Half of the class will sit in the inner circle. The other half of the class will sit in the outer circle. When you are in the outer circle, you will observe one inner-circle student during the conversation.
4. The extra chair in the inner circle is called the "hot seat." If, as an outer-circle student, you would like to enter into the conversation of the students in the inner circle, you may choose to sit in the hot seat and wait to be invited to speak by a classmate in the inner circle. When called on, you may speak to one of the following or similar issues:
 - Ask an inner-circle student to clarify a statement.
 - Ask an inner-circle student to support a statement.
 - Respectfully correct an incorrect statement.
 - Draw attention to a point that has not yet been addressed.
 - Help redirect the seminar back to the original topic.

Remarks from the hot seat should be brief and respectful.

5. Your teacher will not be an active participant in the discussion. She or he will be noting the behavior of the inner-circle students as they converse.
6. An inner-circle student will state the topic and begin the discussion. Then the outer-circle students will complete their observation handouts. They will then share general observations (without naming names) about both positive areas of discussion and areas that need improvement.



7. You will then switch circles and repeat the process. A volunteer states the question or topic.

Expectations for Participation

Both the handout “Student Evaluation for the Socratic Seminar” (Document #: TX001013) and the following lists of positive and negative contributions will describe what type of behavior your teacher expects.

Positive Contributions to the Seminar

You will contribute to the socratic seminar in a positive way if you do the following:

- participate in conversation
- analyze the background text, if relevant, with excellence
- make an outstanding point
- make a good connection to earlier class material
- pose a good question
- allow another speaker to speak before you
- focus the group back on topic
- invite someone to participate
- provide primary support for your argument from literature or the Scriptures

Negative Contributions to the Seminar

You will negatively contribute to the socratic seminar if you do the following:

- interrupt another student
- ridicule another student’s statements rather than disagree
- repeat points without adding new ideas or material
- do not respond when called on to participate
- derail the conversation (get it off track)
- dominate the discussion

