

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 structured way, so it is important to learn the process and the rules.

The Process

1. Before the seminar, your teacher will divide the class into two or more groups. Each group will be assigned a question to consider and will craft a response before coming to class. You will need at least a two-paragraph written response that is well thought out and that cites appropriate sources.
2. Your teacher will arrange the classroom desks into an inner circle and an outer circle, placing one additional “hot seat” in the inner circle (rather than in the middle of the circle). The inner circle will then have one more seat than the outer circle.
3. Half of the class or group will sit in the inner circle of arranged chairs. The other half of the class or group will sit in the outer circle. When you are in the outer circle, you will observe an inner-circle student during the seminar. You will not participate in this discussion in any way except if you are in the hot seat.
4. If, as an outer-circle student, you would like to enter the conversation being held by the inner-circle students, you may choose to sit in the hot seat and wait for a classmate in the inner circle to invite you to speak. 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 to direct the seminar back to the original topic.

Remarks from the hot seat should be brief and respectful. Your positive or negative participation may contribute toward the inner-circle students’ seminar grade.

5. Your teacher will not actively participate in the discussion. She or he will note the behavior of the inner-circle students as they converse.
6. An inner-circle student will state the topic and begin the discussion. Afterward, the outer-circle students will complete their observation handouts. They will then share general observations (without naming names), naming both positive areas and areas that need improvement.
7. You will then switch circles and repeat the process. A volunteer states the question or topic, and the next seminar begins.



Expectations for Participation

Both the handout “Socratic Seminar Observation Form—Student” (Document #: TX001921) and the positive and negative contributions listed here will give you a sense of the behavior your teacher expects.

Positive Contributions to the Seminar

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

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

Negative Contributions to the Seminar

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

- interrupt another student
- ridicule another student’s statements rather than simply 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 without allowing others to participate

