Let’s Talk!

Using the Socratic Seminar Method to Develop 21st Century Skills

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Wisdom begins in wonder.

~Socrates
Socrates

• 469-399 BC
• “I only know that I know nothing.”
• Classical, Greek Athenian philosopher
• Never wrote down any of his ideas!
• His ideas were shared by his student Plato
• Socrates questioned the world around him-
  What is beauty? What is wisdom? What is the right thing to do?
Paideia Philosophy

“All genuine learning is active, not passive. It involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is a process of discovery, in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.” ~Mortimer Adler

- Philosopher Mortimer Adler wrote the Paideia Proposal in 1982. This Paideia Philosophy outlined principles that included that all children can learn, learning should be active, and three types of instruction.
- Three columns of instruction: didactic, coaching of intellectual skills, and Socratic questioning in seminar style.
  - Didactic = 10-15%, Coaching = 60-70%, Seminar = 15-20%
  - Defines a Socratic Seminar as a “collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text.”
What is a Socratic Seminar?

- Thoughtful and collaborative dialogue
- Open-ended discussion
- Respect for other participants
- An opportunity to share one’s best thinking
- Multiple viewpoints working toward a shared understanding
Why Should You Use Socratic Seminar?

• Promotes critical thinking and academic conversation
• Creates an environment where all students feel “safe” to talk and share ideas – respectful communication
• Increases communication skills
• Students must THINK and be aware of their thinking – leads to metacognition
• An excellent strategy that helps to increase reading comprehension
• It’s engaging! Students are actively constructing BIG IDEAS!
• Students have a deeper understanding of others’ perspectives and can articulate different points of view.
• Encourages collaboration and the creation of new ideas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Seminars</strong></th>
<th><strong>Class Discussions</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97% student talk</td>
<td>97% teacher talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average student response = 8-12 seconds</td>
<td>Average student response = 2-3 seconds</td>
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<tr>
<td>No teacher approval or disapproval</td>
<td>Teacher judgment-emphasis on correctness; limited extended thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking is paramount, backed up with textual evidence</td>
<td>Rightness is paramount; thinking ends as soon as one is right</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students listen to peers</td>
<td>Students listen primarily to teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ownership for “flow”</td>
<td>Teacher ownership for “flow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific accountability as testing/documented evidence for grading</td>
<td>A “frill”; nebulously, it counts as participation grade. If absent, didn’t really miss anything—just a class discussion</td>
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Sample Selections for Socratic Seminar

Poems
Speeches
Plays
Short stories
Novels (or an excerpt from)
Essays
Historical documents
Philosophical or scientific works
Mathematical problems
Songs
Paintings or sculptures
Films or movies
Getting Started with Socratic Seminar

- Select a text
- Read text together
- Students write an initial response, identify vocabulary words that are new or interesting and come up with three open-ended questions
- Students share some of their questions
- Conduct actual seminar discussion
- Follow-up activity
Guiding Questions for Seminar Response

• What seems important to you?
• What surprises you?
• What do you like or dislike and why?
• What puzzles you?
• What ideas or thoughts come to mind that connect to other readings or experiences that you have had?
• Did you recognize connections to “big ideas”?
Part One: Seminar Reflection
Write a well-constructed reflection in which you will think about what you have read and share your thoughts and reactions. You can choose to use the questions and suggestions below to guide your thinking as you respond. Just remember, it must be about your thoughts/reaction to the piece. Use quotes from the passage to make your points more meaningful.

Questions to think about:
- What surprises you? What makes you go “hmmmmm?”
- What seems important?
- Do you recognize any connections to “big ideas”?
- What ideas or thoughts come to mind that connect with other readings or to your own life experiences?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Part Two: Vocabulary
Select three words from the text that you do not understand OR that you think are interesting or unusual. Using a dictionary, write the part of speech and a definition for the word as it is used in the passage. Next, write a synonym and antonym for the word. Finally, write an original sentence using the word correctly.

1. WORD: ____________________________________________________ Part of Speech: ____________________
   DEFINITION: ______________________________________________________
   SYNONYM: ____________________ ANTONYMN: ____________________
   SENTENCE: ______________________________________________________

2. WORD: ____________________________________________________ Part of Speech: ____________________
   DEFINITION: ______________________________________________________
   SYNONYM: ____________________ ANTONYMN: ____________________
   SENTENCE: ______________________________________________________

3. WORD: ____________________________________________________ Part of Speech: ____________________
   DEFINITION: ______________________________________________________
   SYNONYM: ____________________ ANTONYMN: ____________________
   SENTENCE: ______________________________________________________
Part Three: Open-ended Questions

Develop and write three open-ended questions that require and provoke discussion!

1. ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________
Creating Questions for Seminars

• Opening Questions- are the most open-ended
  Another (better) title for this piece would be ________?
  The single most important word in this piece is ________?
  The most important sentence or passage is ________?
• Core Questions-asks students to refer to the text
  What is meant by (a specific quote)?
  Why do you say that? Explain what you mean by ________?
  Tell me more about (your last comment)...
  What do you mean by that word (phrase or comment)?
  Where do you find support for that in the text?
• Closing Questions-students summarize what they have learned
  If you were (character) in this piece, what would you say or do?
  What does this text teach us about (issue of particular importance to the participants)?
  Re-ask the opening question and examine why participants changed their minds.
Your Turn~Let’s Have a Seminar!

Seminar Etiquette/Guidelines

• Group is seated and facing each other
• Address each other as Mr. and Ms.
• Be courteous and respectful
• Be patient – speak one at a time
• No sarcasms or put downs
• Be responsible for your own participation
• Use evidence from the text to support your opinion - refer to the text
• Stick to the question
• Pass if you are not ready to speak

✔ Look and listen to the person who is speaking – speak to the group
Step 1 Pre-seminar

Listen to the text as it is read aloud

Quick Write – Your initial response for today!

On your index card, share what you feel is the “big idea” of this story and briefly explain why.
Step 2 Pre-seminar

- Share responses
- Share and discuss vocabulary words
- Share one open-ended question
- Teacher may collect open-ended questions to use during seminar
Step 3 Seminar

Conduct/ participate in seminar

Assign post-seminar activity
Step 4 Post-seminar
Your Follow-Up Activity

How could you use a seminar in your classroom?
# Assessment for Seminar Work

**SEMINAR TITLE:** ________________________________  
**Student Name** ________________________________

## Written Element

### Response
- Connections are made to Prior Knowledge
- Evidence from the text is cited to support opinion.
- Relates to a personal life experience
- Examples are given to support student’s opinion
- Student’s viewpoint is expressed and he/she is able to explain thinking

### Vocabulary
- Words are interesting, challenging, or unique
- Includes part of speech, antonym, and synonym
- Words are defined as used in context
- Includes original sentence that demonstrates understanding

### Questions
- Are open-ended and require discussion
- Lead to additional insights into the text

## Participation Element

### Speaking and Reasoning
- Listens with respect
- Invites Comment
- Waits to be recognized before speaking
- Cites text to support ideas
- Asks questions for clarification
- Explains and justifies reasoning

### Listening
- Looks at speaker
- Follows textual references
- Asks follow-up questions

### Reading
- Takes notes on text
- Highlights critical passages

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# Rubric Scoring Guideline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimal (1)</th>
<th>Basic (2)</th>
<th>Proficient (3)</th>
<th>Advanced (4)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PREPARATION</strong></td>
<td>Does not come to the seminar with necessary materials, and/or does not specify refer to the text during the discussion.</td>
<td>Seminar preparation work is completed and text is referred to during the discussion, but is misquoted and/or used without specific purpose or explanation.</td>
<td>Seminar work is carefully and thoughtfully completed and text is cited appropriately to support comment and insights into the reading.</td>
<td>Seminar work is thoughtful and insightful and text is appropriately cited and interpreted with allusions to other readings which give additional support to comments and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTICIPATION</strong></td>
<td>Has little to contribute during the discussion and/or makes comments that diverge from the question posed by the moderator.</td>
<td>Contributes to the discussion in a limited way and/or does not express ideas clearly and succinctly.</td>
<td>Shares valuable insights and ideas during the discussion, stays focused on question posed, and expresses ideas clearly and succinctly.</td>
<td>Extends and expands discussion by bringing in new information and unique insights relevant to the question posed by the moderator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOLLOW-UP</strong></td>
<td>Little or no connection to the insights and ideas generated during the seminar discussion.</td>
<td>Extends and expands ideas and insights gained through the reading and discussion.</td>
<td>Reflects new insights gained through the discussion and extends and enriches comments and reactions to the reading.</td>
<td>Reflects a clarification and critical examination of the comments and ideas generated during the discussion and offers additional insights and applications.</td>
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</tbody>
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Idea for using Socratic Seminar across disciplines and with different grade levels

**When?** To introduce a unit of study, to expand a unit of study or to conclude a unit of study

**Examples**  
Primary (K-3)

* Aesop's Fables – *The Crow and the Pitcher*
  How were the pebbles able to help the crow get to the water?

* Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
  Big Idea: Change
  Was the caterpillar’s metamorphosis an ordinary or extraordinary event?

* Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree*
  Big Idea: Friendship
  Are the boy and the tree true friends? How do you know?

* Jon Scieszka’s *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
  Big Idea: Point of View
  Do you feel that the third pig should have done more to help/support his siblings?
Upper Elementary (Grades 3-6 & beyond)

Primary Sources

Patrick Henry’s Speech to the Virginia Convention (“Give me liberty or give me death”)
Big Idea: Liberty
What does Patrick Henry mean when saying, ”Give me liberty or give me death”?

John Smith’s Description of the Powhatans, 1612
Big Idea: Perspective
Why did John Smith refer to the Powhatans as barbarous?

Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address
Big Idea: War
What was Lincoln’s main point, the key idea that he wanted everyone to understand?

Poetry
Big Idea: Choice
Robert Frost’s *A Road Not Taken*
How are life’s choices like roads?

Robert Fulghum’s *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*
Big Idea: Wisdom
What rule stands out and why?

Short Stories
The Brother’s Grimm’s *The Fisherman and His Wife*
Big Idea: Greed
Why did the flounder take away everything in the end?
Helpful Tips!

- Inside/Outside Circles – Students in the inner circle are participating in the discussion while students in the outer circle are silent but engaged in a specific task, such as:
  - Identify the most convincing use of the text to support a point
  - The three most important or new insights they heard
  - Three ideas that they disagree with

- Talking Chips-Students must all use one color/chip before others can share

- Students must “qualify” for participation in a seminar- hold students accountable- have alternate assignment for students who are not prepared

- Differentiate pre and post seminar activities- journaling, self-assessment reflections, authentic follow-up projects

- Prepare students in advance who are hesitant to talk
Questions?

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Thank you for participating today~
Enjoy the remainder of the conference!
Bibliography

