



Socratic Seminar

Duration: 1-2 Class Periods | **Overview:** Facilitate a “Socratic Seminar” on a complex text or topic you’ve studied in class.

Steps:

1. Select a text or short texts on the same topic: Choose rich, complex texts that reward close reading. You may use a primary source, a challenging article, or multiple documents on the same topic.
2. Prepare questions: Develop 2-3 open-ended questions that require students to cite evidence and make connections across sources. **Tip:** Avoid questions with simple right answers, unless you are using them to build toward another question.
3. Students prepare: Give students time to read, annotate, and prepare their thinking. They should come ready to cite specific evidence.
4. Arrange in a circle: Seat students in a single circle where everyone can see each other. The teacher sits outside or along the edge as facilitator.
5. Launch the seminar: Pose the opening question. Students lead the discussion, citing text evidence, building on each other’s ideas, and asking follow-up questions of their peers. They may use “talk moves” or sentence stems to assist.
6. Facilitate, don’t lead: The teacher tracks participation, asks clarifying questions if needed, and redirects if the conversation stalls. As the facilitator, you should not provide answers or dominate the conversation.
7. Debrief: Close with reflection on both the content discussion and the quality of the conversation.

Variation:

Fishbowl: a smaller, inner circle engages in the conversation while the outer circle observes and provides feedback. You can have the circles switch halfway through your class—either with a different topic, or to continue the conversation.

Why this works: Socratic Seminars shift responsibility from learning and meaning-making to students while still providing clear structure and support. Plus, sitting in a circle removes the traditional “front of the room” dynamic and signals that the work of interpretation belongs to the group, not just the teacher.