**Socratic Seminar**

A Socratic Seminar is a structured, collaborative dialogue, focusing on a common text or resource, which students have analyzed and toward which they have prepared questions to spur the discussion. This strategy provides a format for students to practice skills in critical thinking, reading, and inquiry, as they participate in the inquiry-based dialogue.

**Instructional Steps**

1.You should read or study the subject or prompt, incorporating the appropriate critical reading process strategies, such as marking the text, pausing to connect ideas, writing in the margins, taking Cornell notes, or analyzing visuals.

2. Remember to complete the following:

• Understand the purpose for reading, following the reading prompt, if provided.

• Preview the text or subject, thinking about any teacher- or student-provided background information, to determine the structure of the text and identify possible biases.

• Prepare your answers to the questions preset questions using specific examples from the text

3. Generate at least two open-ended, higher level Questions that will help them probe deeper into the meaning of the text and the author’s intention. You will be asked to introduce at least one to your general discussion

4. The Role and Responsibilities of the Socratic Seminar Participant and the Rules of Engagement for Socratic Seminar. Sometimes you may play the role of leader, sometimes participant, sometimes listener, or sometimes the Recorder.

As Leader you will:

• Your task is not to make participants “cover” the topic, but to help them use their minds well.

•Read the text in advance and take ample notes to have a deep understanding.

•Focus the group on the opening question as quickly as possible.

•Allow for “think time.” Participants need time to think and process information and ideas.

•Model thoughtful behavior. Ask clarifying and probing questions if others seem stuck or are not asking for evidence, reasoning, or connections back to the text.

•Rephrase a question if participants seem confused by it—or ask another participant to rephrase it.

•Don’t let sloppy thinking or gross misinterpretations go unexamined. Ask participants to offer textual support for their thinking, or to consider what \_\_\_\_\_ would say about their interpretation.

•Pay attention to what is not being discussed. If there is a perspective that is not being represented, introduce it.

•Guide participants to discuss their differences and work through conflicts respectfully.

•Involve reluctant participants while restraining more vocal members.

•Avoid making eye contact with participants if they continually talk to you rather than the group.

•Do not dominate the discussion or withdraw entirely; you are a participant, too.

As Speaker you have several jobs:

*Explorer:* Let's try a new path or perspective...

*Gadfly:* Everyone seems to be too easily content with saying...

*Sherlock Holmes:* Ithink we have overlooked an important clue (comment/bit of text)..

*Librarian*: Here's a passage in the text that supports your point...

*Matchmaker:* What you are saying is a lot like what Sue said earlier...

*Judge Judy:* Let's see what the argument is between you two and try to settle it...

*Will Rogers:* Let's find a way to make her/his seemingly odd/unpleasant/ incorrect comment more plausible or helpful...

As Listener you will have several jobs:

*Journalist:* Summarize the important points briefly

*Map-maker:* Make a visual chart of paths and terrain covered in the conversation, noting major "landmarks" and "twists and turns"

*Shadow:* Listen to and observe one person for a fixed period of time, noting their

comments and behavior (effective in large classes and for listening skill practice)

*Referee* Judge which "moves" in the discussion seem warranted or unwarranted (interms of content) and exemplary of or outside the "rules" of good seminar behavior (in terms of process)

*Coach:* Diagnose the overall "play" and propose some new ones, improvements in performance, strategies, etc.

As Recorder you will:

• Keep track of the flow—or order—of dialogue, utilizing the Tracking Form for Socratic Seminar, which can then be displayed afterward on a document camera.

• Draw draw small circles within the larger provided circle for each participating student.

• As dialogue begins, draw a line from the first speaker (who asks the opening question) to the second speaker, to the third speaker, and so on, continuing to draw lines throughout the whole Seminar. Different marks and letters can be placed next to each smaller circle, depending upon the student’s contribution to the discussion: a question mark if a question was asked, an exclamation point for an ah-ha moment, the letter “S” for a statement, the letter “X” for an explanation, and the letter “R” if the text was referenced.

• If the Seminar pauses or new speakers enter the speaking circle, have the student change pen colors so that lines will denote any influential difference, no matter how slight, due to the personnel change.

5. The class will be divided into two concentric circles. You should be able to see everyone without having to lean forward or backward. Students should also have all of their necessary materials for participating in the Seminar—marked text, questions, pen and paper for taking notes—with them.

6. Determine the opening question for the dialogue using one of the methods below:

• The Seminar leader, who can also be seated in the circle, poses an opening question relating to the text in order to initiate the dialogue. The dialogue continues as group members ask clarifying questions or offer responses. Consistently require students to build upon the comments and analysis of others.

• Each student in the circle reads one of his/her questions. After listening carefully, the Seminar leader or the students can select one as the starting question to open the conversation.

7. Continue the Socratic Seminar in this manner until all of the questions have been explored or time has drawn to a close.

8. Conduct a Whip-Around so that each student can provide a closing thought or rhetorical question that summarizes their thinking.

9. The final step of the Socratic Seminar is to debrief and reflect upon the process, turn in your notes, individually generated questions, and your self-evaluation/peer evaluation sheet.