

Global Studies

Socratic Seminar Student Reference Guide

What is a Socratic Seminar?

It is a method of learning that focuses on your ability to think rather than memorize "right" answers. Students are given opportunities to "examine" a common piece of text. After "reading" the common text "like a love letter", open-ended questions are posed. Open-ended questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in text, and express ideas clearly and confidently. The discussion requires students to set aside personal opinions or biases.

A debate is designed to win an argument and decide on a final solution. Participants in a Socratic Seminar, however, respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement.

Rules of the Socratic Seminar

1. Groups are split into teams of four (4). Two team members will defend the Europeans and the other two will defend the Mesoamericans.
2. Each team will be responsible for preparing for the seminar by reviewing notes, handouts, images, and textbook readings. You MUST be completely prepared because the topic of discussion will be fluid and always changing.
3. Once your team enters the Socratic Circle you will discuss a given prompt for no less than 4 minutes. After your team's time expires a new team will enter and resume the discussion where it was left off.
4. Audience members must always pay attention and take notes since their team may be called next.
5. An audience member may at any time enter the Hot Seat. The Hot Seat allows an audience member to pose a question, idea, or issue to the team. Anything posed at the Hot Seat becomes the new topic of discussion.
6. The discussion will continue until all groups have participated at least once.

Expectations for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
3. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
4. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.

5. Listen carefully.
6. Speak up so that all can hear you.
7. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
8. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
9. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

How will I be graded?

When we are evaluating your Socratic Seminar participation, we ask the following questions about participants. Did they....

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not just to the leader?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?