

WHO QUESTIONS? THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR

What is a Socratic Seminar?

A Socratic seminar is a discussion in which students take part. This method of teaching is based on the Greek philosopher Socrates and his theory that students learned most effectively when engaged in open-ended dialogue.

You, as the teacher, will ask a question and students' role is to answer the question, using the material studied. The question that you begin the dialogue with may vary, depending on your focus of study but should be open-ended and provide material for thought.

Some potential prompts for a lesson plan dealing with issues of immigration and expulsion are as follows:

- *What were the motivations of the leaders of the anti-Chinese movements in Seattle and Tacoma?*
- *What kind of effect did the Chinese Exclusion Act have on the people it targeted? How has it influenced their descendants' lives today?*
- *What is the role of the United States' government in regards to immigration? What issues are the same as they were in the 1880s and what has changed?*

While the first question will be asked by the teacher, the role of the instructor is to guide, rather than lead, the discussion. This is a chance for students to explore the topic in depth. As part of this exercise, students are asked to bring their own questions to the discussion. Be sure to allow time for some of those points to be discussed.

Review the guidelines below with your students before they begin.

Guidelines 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're not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's okay to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. Don't participate if you're not prepared.
4. Don't stay confused. If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask them to explain further.
5. Stay on the topic currently being discussed. If another idea comes to your mind, make a note about it so that you can come back to it later.
6. Don't raise your hand. Instead, take turns speaking.
7. Listen carefully to what everyone has to say. Respect others- you may disagree with their points or opinions but the seminar is for discussion, not argument.
8. Speak up so that everyone can hear you.
9. Talk to the rest of your class, not just to the leader or teacher.
10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.