



# Socratic Seminar

# EXPECTATIONS

The Socratic Seminar is named after the Greek philosopher Socrates, who believed in the power of social learning and deliberate discussion. Socrates believed that humans learned best from questioning and discussion. He believed discussion helped individuals critically think through complex ideas and learn better than they could on their own. You can think of a Socratic Seminar as an “intellectual discussion,” but you can also see it as a conversation where you “think out loud” and “talk it out.” Essentially, it is a **student-led discussion over a text or big idea**. Instead of the teacher facilitating the discussion by asking questions, you will take charge of your own learning in this activity. It is a student-centered and social approach to learning, which means you have greater freedom, but also more responsibility. This means you and your peers must prepare for the seminar, or else the seminar will not work. Before the seminar, you will create questions, collect evidence, and prepare notes. The seminar will be as meaningful as you and your peers make it!

## Focus Skills

Socratic Seminars require the use of many essential skills:

- Participating in collaborative discussions
- Analyzing multiple interpretations
- Analyzing themes
- Analyzing author's choices
- Analyzing literary structure
- Analyzing word choice
- Synthesizing texts and ideas
- Citing textual evidence

## CHECKLIST

- Carefully read the text. Re-read parts, if necessary.
- THINK! Yes, this gets its own spot on the checklist. 😊
- Familiarize yourself with the question types/examples.
- Brainstorm questions.
- Find and select evidence.
- Prepare notes in response to your questions.
- Be ready to discuss!



# *Socratic Seminar*

# QUESTION TYPES

## *Real life* QUESTION

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A real life question connects the text to the real world. These questions ask for specific connections or pose an essential question to readers using a “What would you do” approach.

## *Big Ideas* QUESTION

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A big ideas questions address the “big ideas” of the text. Consider ideas, themes, and motifs. Then, ask a question that asks the author’s message or purpose about those ideas. Usually, these questions begin with “What,” but they could also ask “How” or “Why.”

## *Open-Ended* QUESTION

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An open-ended question does not have a definitive answer. It requires insightful interpretation of the text. This is a question that different people would answer in different ways, with different pieces of evidence and different lenses of thinking. Usually, these questions start with “How” or “Why.”

## *Literary Analysis* QUESTION

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A literary analysis question requires the examination of author's choices. Consider characters, plot, ideas, and structure. This question should ask why the author made a specific choice and what the impact/effect of the choice was. Usually, these questions start with “Why did [author] choose to...”

## *Quote Dissection* QUESTION

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A dissection question requires the analysis of an essential quote--but not one that is straightforward and easy to comprehend. The quote you choose should be “open to interpretation,” with complex word choice. Usually, these questions start with “What does [author] mean by...”

## *Text to Text* QUESTION

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A text-to-text question encourages a comparison to a different text or idea studied in class. Think about a thematically relevant text. This could be a song, poem, article, etc. Whatever text you choose, you must select a key excerpt/quote that will serve as the basis for comparison, so that others can analyze the connections.



# Socratic Seminar

## QUESTION EXAMPLES

### Real life QUESTION

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Could/would you conduct a "social experiment" for a simple life in nature? (Thoreau's *Walden*)

### Big Ideas QUESTION

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What is Shakespeare's message about love/lust in *Romeo and Juliet*?

### Open-Ended QUESTION

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How does Nick Carraway feel about Eastern society in *The Great Gatsby*?

### literary Analysis QUESTION

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Why did Miller choose to create an affair between Abby Williams and John Proctor in *The Crucible* when there was no evidence of such an affair in historical records? What is the impact of the affair on the play's themes and Miller's allegorical purpose?

### Quote Dissection QUESTION

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In "The Road Not Taken," what does Frost mean by "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference"?

### Text to Text QUESTION

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How does *Into the Wild* demonstrate Transcendental thinking found in Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Thoreau's *Walden*?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



# Socratic Seminar

# PREPARATION

Using the "Question Types" and "Question Examples" handouts, create questions for the Socratic Seminar. For each question, write notes in response, and find strong and relevant textual evidence to support your analysis.

## Real life QUESTION

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Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Big Ideas QUESTION

.....  
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Open-Ended QUESTION

.....  
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# *Literary Analysis* QUESTION

.....  
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# *Quote Dissection* QUESTION

.....  
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# *Text to Text* QUESTION

.....  
Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes & Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# *Additional* QUESTIONS

.....  
Questions (your choice): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_



# Socratic Seminar SELF-EVALUATION

For each category, rate yourself on a scale of 1-10. Then, explain and reflect upon your rating.

*Discussion*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

.....  
Did you ask or respond to many questions, ask follow-up questions, and move the discussion forward?

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Analysis*

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Did you offer meaningful analysis of the text?

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What was the most meaningful, interesting question asked? Why?

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Considering the seminar as a whole, how well do you think it went? Explain.

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*Take note...*

What will you do differently for the next Socratic Seminar? Explain.

