

HANDOUT 2.2.3

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text. In the Seminar, students systematically question and examine issues and principles related to a particular content and articulate different points-of-view. The group conversation assists students in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and participation. In a Socratic Seminar, the students carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the discussion. Good discussions occur when students study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas. The discussion is not about right answers; it is not a debate. Students are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful, manner.

The Seminar can be divided into three time periods:

Before the Seminar

- Introduce the seminar and its purpose (to facilitate a deeper understanding of the religious diversity in Germany today through shared discussion).
- Have students read the text in advance and prepare some open-ended questions to be used as the 'ticket' to participate in the seminar.
- The classroom should be arranged so that students can look at each other directly. A circle or square works well. Some teachers like to use desks and have students use name card tents; others prefer simply to use chairs without desks.
- Prepare several questions in advance, in addition to questions that students may bring to class. Questions should lead participants into the core ideas of the article. Questions must be open-ended, reflect genuine curiosity, and have no 'one right answer'! Choose one question as the key interpretive question of the seminar to focus on and begin discussion.
- Review the Discussion Norms:
 - Don't raise hands
 - Listen carefully
 - Address one another respectfully
 - Base any opinions on the text
 - Address comments to the group (no side conversations)
 - Use sensitivity to take turns and not interrupt others
 - Be courageous in presenting your own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence

During the Seminar

- Be seated at the level of the students and remind them to address each other and not you!
- Pose the key question to focus on and begin discussion.
- Ask students to relate their statements to particular passages, to clarify, and to elaborate.
- Encourage students to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement.
- If the conversation gets off track, refocus students on the opening question by restating it.
- Use additional questions to move the discussion along.
- Invite those who have not spoken into the conversation.

- Summarize the main points made in the discussion, either at a quiet point or towards the end
- Use closing questions that encourage participants to apply the ideas to their personal experiences and opinions. Answering these closing questions does not require use of the text but provides students with the chance to share their own perspectives.

After the Seminar

- Ask debriefing questions of the students.
- Share your own experience with the seminar as a facilitator.

Portions of this template have been adapted from Teacher Resource Documents from the Northwest Association for Biomedical Research. The original and complete pdf can be located at the following site: <http://nwabr.org/teacher-center/ethics-primer#lessons>