



SOCRATIC SEMINARS

A Preparatory Overview

PURPOSE

- ✿ Student-centered
- ✿ Promotes thought, dialogue and ownership of learning
- ✿ Leads to self-knowledge and understanding
- ✿ Places ownership of learning with the student
- ✿ Increases student participation and confidence

DIALOGUE V. DEBATE

- * **Dialogue** is collaborative; students work toward shared understanding
- * Through **dialogue** one listens to understand, make meaning and find common ground
- * **Dialogue** creates an open-minded attitude
- * In **dialogue**, one searches for strengths in all positions
- * **Debate** is oppositional; two sides try to prove the other wrong
- * In **debate**, one listens to find fault or flaw in the other, then develop counter arguments
- * **Debate** creates a close-minded attitude
- * In **debate**, one searches for weakness in the other position

DIALOGUE V. DEBATE

- ❖ **Dialogue** respects other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend

- ❖ **Dialogue** assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation leads to greater understanding

- ❖ **Dialogue** remains open-ended

- ❖ **Debate** rebuts contrary positions and may belittle other participants

- ❖ **Debate** assumes that there is a single right answer that somebody already has

- ❖ **Debate** demands a conclusion; a final endpoint

NORMS

- ✿ Refer to the text; this isn't a test of your memory
- ✿ Ask for clarification if you're confused
- ✿ Talk directly to others and use names
- ✿ Stick to the point that's being discussed
- ✿ Make notes about any ideas to revisit
- ✿ Share the air and take turns speaking without raising hands
- ✿ Listen carefully and respectfully
- ✿ Discuss **ideas** rather than **opinions**

QUESTIONS

- ❖ **Literal** questions – clarifying questions with one correct answer from the text. While basic, they are critical to our understanding since they form the foundation of the higher-level questions. *Examples:*
 - ❖ What happened?
 - ❖ Who...? When...?
 - ❖ After he returns to Denmark, how many times does Hamlet mention avenging his father's death?

QUESTIONS

- ❖ **Interpretive** questions – scratch-the-surface questions that are supported by the text, but these have multiple defensible answers. Requires us to make reasonable interpretations and inferences based on evidence from the text. *Examples:*
 - ❖ What does... mean?
 - ❖ What would have been a better title?
 - ❖ Why doesn't Hamlet avenge his father's death when he returns to Denmark?

QUESTIONS

- ❖ **Evaluative** questions – brain-expanding, thinking questions based on evidence from the text *and* the reader's values, beliefs and experiences. Responses cannot be deemed right or wrong since they tend to be subjective, yet still based on textual evidence. *Examples:*
- ❖ Do you agree with the author that...?
- ❖ Is it true that...?
- ❖ Should Hamlet have acted sooner to avenge his father's death?

PREPARATION

- ✿ Re-read key passages of the text
- ✿ Annotate the key passages
- ✿ Come up with at least one of each of the three types of questions you'd like to discuss in the Socratic Seminar
- ✿ These questions will serve as your entry slip on the day of the Socratic Seminar



QUESTIONS?