

Civil Rights - "I Have a Dream"

Socratic Seminar - Student Handout

Introduction

For this assignment, students will participate in a Socratic Seminar. A Socratic Seminar is defined as a 'collaborative, intellectual dialogue with open-ended questions about a text.'

Purpose

The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text. In the Seminar, students question and examine issues and principles related to a particular content, and consider different points-of-view. The group conversation assists students in establishing meaning through 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 thoughtful manner.



Focus Question

To what extent did Martin Luther King's speech reflect the changing nature of American society?

Overview

A Socratic Seminar is a structured process that requires student participation for it to run successfully. The following steps are necessary to the process of a Socratic Seminar.

Step 1 (Close Reading)

- Students will closely read the provided text.

Step 2 (Annotation and Questions)

- Students will mark (annotate) the provided text using the included strategies as related to the focus question for the Socratic Seminar. While annotating the text, students will need to create their open-ended questions and include these questions in the margins of the text. The open-ended questions can be created using the included strategies. This step is critical, as all discussion in a Socratic Seminar must center on the text itself.

Step 3 (Seminar)

- The students will arrange their chairs into a circle so that the group is facing each other. Students not directly participating in the Seminar will sit in another circle outside of the main circle.
- The teacher will open the discussion with the focus question: (To what extent did Martin Luther King's speech reflect the changing nature of American society?)
- Students in the inner circle will begin discussing their responses to the focus question based on the annotations they made in their close reading. The teacher does not play an active role in this portion and students are responsible for carrying the conversation by referencing specific portions of the text. Students need to consider and follow the rules/guidelines for the Socratic Seminar.
- During the discussion of the focus question the students may begin bringing up their questions in order to delve deeper into the text and to facilitate more discussion.
- Students in the outer circle complete the evaluation form and need to be ready to discuss the overall process of the inner circle's discussion. Therefore, the outer circle needs to listen carefully to the discussion of the inner circle.

Open-ended Questions from the Text (Step 2)

When preparing for a Socratic Seminar, write questions using these sentence starters to stimulate your thinking about the text you read. Your questions must reference specific lines from the text. In preparation for the Socratic Seminar, create at least three questions using the following:

- I'm confused about...

- The big idea seems in this case seems to be...

- The most interesting claim the author made was...

- I'd like to talk with other people about ...

- I have questions about...

- Another point of view is...

- Do you think...

- What does it mean when the author says...

How to Mark the Text: Evidence from the Text(s) (Step 2)

Use the following strategy to help you prepare for the Socratic Seminar.

- Underline or highlight excerpts or quotes from the text you consider important, interesting or caught your attention and address the focus question. Consider making short notes in the margins that summarize or capture the "big idea" of the quote or excerpt.
- Create open-ended questions based on the "Open-ended Questions the Text" handout that explore deeper into the meaning or "big ideas" of the text. Questions should reference specific ideas or lines from the text. Open-ended questions create discussion.
- Identify (circle, star, highlight in a different colour, etc) words, lines or excerpts from the text that interested you or you need further explanation for. (Ex. Vocab, etc.)

When you are done annotating, your page should look something like this:

