



Support: Socratic Seminar

ELA

Math

Science

Social Studies

- To discuss major themes, character motivations, or other major literary elements in a literary text to prepare to write.
- To discuss ambiguous and possibly opposing views presented across texts.

- To discuss different problem types and possibly different methods of solving.

- To discuss growing, and sometimes opposing, ideas related to phenomena.
- To discuss ideas, refine thinking, and eventually come to a consensus about scientific ideas related to a phenomenon.

- To discuss ambiguous and possibly opposing views presented across texts.
- To discuss implications presented in varying primary and secondary sources about a historical topic.

Who could this support?

- Students preparing to write about complex topics that lend themselves to deeper exploration.
- Students who need the structure of discussion to think deeper about a topic.

Purpose:

- To participate in an academic, text-centered discussion in preparation for a writing task.
- To form text-supported claims about reading.
- To have collaborative discussions with peers to broaden their understanding of a topic.
- To develop a deeper understanding of a topic or to challenge their thinking.

Communicating the purpose:

Remind students that they are always [reading and writing for a purpose](#), and that today's purpose will be to have an academic discussion which will prepare them to think more deeply about a topic and comprehend complex text and ideas.

Pre-work

Preparing for the discussion

- Select a focal point for discussion if one is not already indicated within the curriculum.

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- Post novel, or at selected critical points of the novel
- Culture and context of novels

- Examining multiple theories
- Discussing multiple approaches to types of problems

- To discuss potential investigations, solutions, and/or evaluate how a solution meets the criteria and constraints of a problem.

- Analyzing opposing viewpoints in history
- Implications of court cases/laws/hearings



Process

Prework

1. Provide a clear, thought-provoking prompt based on texts students have read. Supply a graphic organizer in advance for them to organize their thoughts, including space for responses, textual evidence, and student-generated questions.
 - [Analyze the prompt](#) beforehand to ensure that students understand the prompt.
 - Prepare additional questions and possible answers to support conversation, and examples of open-ended discussion questions before students do so themselves. For example:
 - The prompt [linked here is from the 7th grade unit on *The Giver*](#). Students may need some scaffolded support through teacher questioning if they are not able to move the conversation along on their own. These should be aligned to the prompt.
 - Some potential questions to have ready for the above prompt are:
 - How does the way Jonas responded to the knowledge he had impact the way the novel ends?
 - In what ways did Jonas consider the possible consequences of his decision? Did he make the right one by leaving?
 - What are some common trends we read throughout the novel that have lead to identifying the overarching theme?
 - Consider using higher levels of [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) to develop questions.
 - Set assessment criteria:
 - Assess students based on their ability to form and defend claims supported by text, as well as speaking and listening standards, and lesson objectives.
 - Keep in mind that this instructional strategy supports [all domains of language](#) (reading, writing, speaking and listening), so the assessment criteria should reflect students reaching proficiency in the addressed domains.
 - Prepare a discussion tracker.
 - 2. Post discussion prep:
 - Develop a reflection document for students to evaluate their performance and the performance of their class, while setting goals for improvement. Some possible questions for reflection:
 - What is something that was discussed today that confirms what you thought?
 - What was discussed that may have changed your opinion on something?
 - On a scale of 1-5, how well do you rate your class on adhering to the norms?
 - On a scale of 1-5, how well do you rate your performance in adhering to the norms?
 - What is something you hope to get better at in future discussions? What is something you did well?
 - 3. Physical Set up- Arrange desks in either:
 - One large circle for all students to participate simultaneously.
 - One inner and outer circle, ideally with equal numbers. Inner circle participants discuss while outer circle members observe and provide feedback to the person opposite them. At designated intervals, they switch positions to continue the discussion. This structure is recommended for large class sizes.



Process (continued)

- Step 1**
- Have students sit in formation when they come into class and take out their text, something to write with, and their prep materials.
 - Students will help generate a list of norms for the discussion that they agree to follow (examples: one person speaking at a time, using people's names when responding, handling disagreements respectfully, etc).
 - Teacher will establish non-negotiable expectations of this discussion (specific requirements for participation, text evidence inclusion, requirements on the rubric, etc).
 - Explain the teacher's role in this activity as a facilitator and the criteria for assessing.
- Step 2**
- Present the prompt and start the discussion. As the students are discussing, the teacher will track student participation and insert teacher commentary or questions as needed. Early in the year, the teacher may need to be more involved, but the goal is to facilitate rather than participate. The teacher should ask probing questions, highlight strong contributions, remind students of norms, and clarify when necessary.
- Step 3**
- Allow the discussion to organically continue for a predetermined time that fits into the instructional block. Pausing when needed to switch roles for inner/outer circle setup or to clarify misconceptions.
 - If students are struggling to have a conversation that is organically flowing, use your pre-generated questions, or [talk moves](#) to help student elaborate further on their answers.
 - Length of the discussion will vary depending on class size, the type of prompt, and how many sources students needed to address— but a good rule of thumb is having rounds of about 10-20 minutes, while keeping some flexibility if students seem to be eager to further explore a topic of discussion that is particularly meaningful to the prompt.
- Step 4**
- Provide whole class feedback after the discussion. Highlight good participation and mention 1-2 areas for improvement. Use the agreed-upon discussion norms and grading criteria to guide feedback, and remind students of these points before the next discussion.
- Step 5**
- Students should complete individual reflections as part of their assessment. Review these and return them before the next discussion as reminders of their strengths and areas for improvement.
- I know I'm successful when...**
- Students continue to progress to more and more student-led discussions and their writing reflects thoughtful discussion:
- All students were able to engage in a rich discussion based in text meaningfully
 - Students were able to develop claims and defend them with evidence and reasoning
 - Students were able to challenge one another's thinking when warranted
 - Student writing was reflective of students being able to deeply analyze a text



Additional Considerations

- Use [creating a claim](#) support for students struggling to develop appropriate claims.
- Use [student exemplars](#) of acceptable student-generated questions or acceptable responses to the prompt.
- Use [frames](#) to help students struggling to put their responses into words on the graphic organizer, as students become more proficient, the goal is to remove this support so that they are able to participate through natural conversation.
- Students who struggle with speaking skills may benefit from smaller group discussion first with more teacher support and/or the use of teacher talk moves to drive the conversation.
- All students who need extra support should have clear steps for how to duplicate, and may even benefit from small group instruction with an additional model and think-aloud.
- Collaborative groupings are also a great structure for additional support. Allow students to brainstorm possible claims in their groups, or give each other feedback prior to checking it. Model what these conversations should sound like and circulate to ensure they are meaningful.
- This particular strategy can be used as a precursor to writing about the same topic to allow students to both generate ideas and interact with their peers about texts they will need to write about.

References

- Davenport, M. (2016, September 22). *Socratic seminars: Building a culture of student-led discussion*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/socratic-seminars-culture-student-led-discussion-mary-davenport>
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