

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

A Socratic seminar is a structured discussion that supports students with critical and creative thinking, synthesizing and developing deep comprehension of texts, and refining their thinking in preparation for writing. Socratic seminar features extend student-to-student discussion of ideas, rather than a teacher-driven question and answer format. Socratic seminars can come early in a module, to support inquiry and a purpose for reading, or after reading one or more texts, to support synthesis and create a foundation for writing.

Socratic seminars include six stages, outlined in detail below:

1. Preparation and classroom management
2. Begin the seminar
3. Gather text evidence
4. Continue the seminar
5. Close the seminar
6. Progress monitor and assess

1. PREPARATION AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

WHEN: At the beginning of the lesson or right before the seminar

WHAT: Teacher and students review expectations, set group and individual goals, and designate student roles.

HOW:

- Share a Socratic Seminar Anchor Chart, located in KIPP Wheatley student handout files and Socratic seminar lesson appendices.
- Encourage students to identify personal goals, such as, “Today, I will focus on responding to what my teammates say”; “I will work on asking meaty questions.”
- Remind students of habits of good discussion and text talk.

2. ORGANIZE STUDENTS AND ENVIRONMENT

WHEN: During lesson prep, decide how you want to organize the space and the facilitation for the seminar.

WHAT: Choose from different options for room set-up and facilitation.

HOW:

- Choose a classroom organization that ensures students can see each other, everybody has frequent opportunities to collaborate, and you can monitor progress. Some options from the Teacher Resource Guide include:
 - FISHBOWL
 - INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLE
 - ROUNDTABLE
 - SEATING (ideas for tables, rows, circles, etc.)
 - GROUPING (ideas for individual, partner, small group, and whole group work)
- Other organization options include:
 - **Single Circle:** Circle of all students
 - **3-Ring Seminar:** Three seminars in different parts of the room, best for students experienced with seminar, grades 4-8
- Some facilitation options from the Teacher Resource Guide include:
 - TALKING STICK
 - BEACH BALL
 - WHIP-AROUND
 - POPCORN

- Other facilitation options include:
 - **Talking Chips:** Students are given a fixed number of chips to “spend” when they add a question or comment. They must spend all their chips and they cannot go over.
 - **Rotating Facilitator:** The teacher passes facilitation rights to a student or series of students at some point in the seminar.

See the [Collaboration Discussion](#) section of the Teacher Resource Guide for a full range of instructional routines, facilitation options, and classroom organization ideas to support student engagement and collaboration.

3. BEGIN THE SEMINAR

WHEN: During READ FOR GIST

WHAT: Teacher introduces the seminar question and students develop personal questions about the related texts.

HOW:

- Share an open-ended, important question that has multiple potential answers and leads to deep comprehension.
- As needed, scaffold the question with literal and foundational questions.
- Direct students to develop their own questions about the texts, prompted by the seminar question.

4. GATHER TEXT EVIDENCE

WHEN: During READ FOR DEEPER MEANING

WHAT: Students gather text evidence aligned to the seminar question and purpose.

HOW:

- Direct students to collect text evidence to answer the seminar question during READ FOR GIST or HOMEWORK
- During reading, students flag text evidence with sticky notes or take notes with page/paragraph citations.
- After reading, direct students to choose their best evidence.

5. CONDUCT THE SEMINAR

WHEN: During TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

WHAT: Facilitate discussion where students build and respond to each other’s thoughts rather than just directing answers to the teacher.

HOW: Use the Participation Chart in the KIPP Wheatley lesson.

Support critical thinking by:

- Neither affirming nor challenging student ideas, either verbally or non-verbally
- Asking follow-up questions such as:
 - *What do you mean by that?*
 - *Can you say more about her point?*
 - *What in the text shows that point?*
 - *Does anything in the text argue that point?*
- Staying with a question or a topic for several rounds
- Encouraging students to ask questions themselves
- Asking questions about *what* the text says, *how* it says it, and what it *means*
- Asking questions about the way texts connect to each other *or* how texts connect to students’ lives and communities

Encourage equal participation by:

- Using invitational rather than right/wrong question stems, such as:
 - *What might be an answer?*
 - *What do you think?*
 - *What are some reasons...?*
- Asking students to provide evidence for another person’s point, offer a different point of view, or add onto a point
- Asking students to identify the next speaker
- Putting more actively engaged students on hold for a short time

Support a culture of evidence by:

- Always asking for text evidence (can be supplied by another student)
- Asking everyone to follow along in their texts
- Asking students to start with specific citations, such as “on line 3,” “in this drawing” or “When Amos says...”

6. CLOSE THE SEMINAR

WHEN: At the end of the seminar

WHAT: Teachers and students reflect on the seminar.

HOW:

- Pose a final question. This can be a return to the Seminar Question, a segue to a writing task, or a question, such as, “What changed about your thinking today?”
- Prompt students to evaluate:
 - the seminar according to the class’s Socratic Seminar Anchor Chart.
 - their own participation.

7. PROGRESS MONITOR AND ASSESS

WHEN: Throughout the seminar

WHAT: Teacher assesses student participation and the effectiveness of the seminar in meeting learning goals.

HOW:

- Track student participation with a dialogue map, tracking chart, or student self-reporting.
 - During the seminar, keep an anecdotal record or check off each time a student participates.
 - Use a code, such as:
 - Q = Questions
 - B = Builds
 - TE = Text Evidence
 - R = Responds
- Evaluate effectiveness of the seminar in meeting learning goals by options, such as:
 - Students respond to the exit ticket of the lesson.
 - Students write their own response to the focus question.
 - Students draft ideas for a writing task aligned to the focus question.
 - Students write how their thinking changed or grew as a result of the seminar.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

SOCRATIC SEMINAR VIDEO

This [video of a Socratic seminar in action](#)¹ shows students participating in a Socratic seminar. Use the video to plan or model for students. See the [Collaboration Discussion](#) section of the Teacher Resource Guide for other organization options.

COLLECTING SEMINAR DATA

As students discuss seminar questions, teachers can take notes to support each student in speaking and listening, text understandings, and participation, depending on their needs. Note-taking can range from more formal use of rubrics to simple anecdotal notes.

The table below shows the different ways teachers can measure how students are communicating.

COMMUNICATION FORMS	MEASURES	EXAMPLES
Speaking & Listening	individual contributions	mapping, tallying, recordings, transcripts, “two cents worth”
	group grade	debriefing, rubric, goal setting
	observation forms	outer-circle forms, random selection
	self-assessment	checklist, paired checklist, goal achievement
Writing & Reading	written work	journaling, thesis papers, writing prompts
Reading & Writing Listening & Speaking	rubrics	participation rubric, personal goal rubric, comprehensive rubric

The tables below show different tools teachers can use to track student participation and communication.

Sample Student Participation Tracking Chart

Create one row for each student participating. Add additional grade or class-specific goals as needed.

LISTENING			READING		SPEAKING		WRITING	
Name	Builds on earlier comments	Faces speaker	References text	Accurate key text understandings	On topic	Respectful	Adds new insight	Annotated text

Sample Observation Form

Create one row for each student participating. Record notes and quotes throughout the conversation.

NAME	AREAS OF STRENGTH	AREAS OF GROWTH	FOLLOW UP (Y/N)

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBPGJaiABog&feature=youtu.be>