

Goal: Build student ownership of learning and deepen understanding of content through student-led discussion

Socratic Seminar

A Socratic Seminar is a student-led discussion centered around a specific text (e.g., poem, article, chapter of a novel, etc.). Prior to a Socratic Seminar, the teacher selects a text that promotes student inquiry and provides multiple options for interpretation. Students then read and annotate the text to prepare for discussion. During Socratic Seminars students collaboratively deepen their understanding of the content by discussing open-ended questions and listening attentively to the responses of others.

Challenges

Not all students are able to read and comprehend the selected text due to differences in reading ability and background/content knowledge. As a result, some students are not able to contribute to the discussion.

Even though all students have read the text, the discussion is dominated by a few students. Some students lack confidence and are reluctant to participate. Those who do participate don't build on each other's ideas or ask thoughtful questions.

The teacher does not know which parts of the text students struggled with or where they were most engaged while reading. As a result, the teacher is less knowledgeable about how to best to guide the seminar and promote further student inquiry.



Solutions

The teacher embeds notes, media, and "Extra Help" to support struggling readers. This scaffolded instruction deepens all students' understanding of the content and prepares them to have a meaningful discussion.

Responding to questions and notes in writing before the seminar helps students prepare for discussion. By reviewing each other's responses, students gain new ideas and are excited to continue the conversation during the Socratic Seminar.

Prior to the discussion, the teacher reviews question responses, notes, and other assignment data. The teacher uses this information to identify misunderstandings and plan questions to prompt discussion during Socratic Seminar.

Thinking about using Actively Learn for Socratic Seminar? Here are some tips:

- Choose a text that includes multiple perspectives and challenges common beliefs. Check out the [Knowledge Sets](#) on Actively Learn for sequenced texts that help students dive into an engaging topic!
- Include open-ended, thought-provoking questions in the reading assignment. (e.g., *Instead of: Who was the hero of the story? Try: Would all the characters agree that ___ was a hero?*)
- Provide sentence frames in "Extra Help" to build academic discussion and language skills.
- Display [notes](#) from the reading during the seminar to highlight a compelling idea or question.
- Select one or two students to be discussion leaders. These students can review all of the notes and responses before the Socratic Seminar and prepare discussion questions.