



Socratic Seminar Diagram: Traditional Circle

Attitudes/ Behaviors

Roles/ Responsibilities



“Hot Seat”
Students use the “hot seat” to briefly enter the discussion.

Wait to speak.

Speak respectfully.

Reference the text.

Look at others while speaking.

Listen to understand.

Discussion Director
asks the opening question and keeps the discussion focused.

Time Keeper
monitors time and makes sure all students in the circle have a chance to speak.

Scribe/ Notetaker
keeps a record of the conversation.

Knowledge is shared and created by all members.

The discussion should be based on a text students read in class or at home. This should be more like a discussion than a debate.

Tips and Strategies



Set high expectations for the discussion.



Support the discussion with sentence starters.



Ask students to discuss the text in small groups before inviting them into the Socratic circle.



Provide at least 35 minutes for the seminar.



Engage all students during the discussion. Inside circle talks while outside circle listens and takes notes.



The teacher should not be part of the conversation; he or she should be monitoring and assessing students.



The discussion should begin with an engaging, higher-level question.



Socratic Seminar Traditional Process

Step 1 Read and Analyze a Text

Students read and analyze a text before engaging in a Socratic Seminar. Students should use the "Marking a Text" strategy and other analytical strategies like "Charting a Text" and "Organizing Information" in order to gain a deep understanding of the text.

Step 2 Prepare for the Socratic Seminar

Students complete the "Socratic Seminar Discussion Map." This handout can be found on the "Socratic Seminar" strategy page. This work can be done in class or at home.

Step 3 Establish Group Norms

Teacher and students establish (or go over) norms for the Socratic Seminar. A set of norms are available on the "Socratic Seminar" strategy page.

Step 4 Review the Socratic Circle

Teacher establishes the purpose for the Socratic Seminar and uses the "Socratic Circle Diagram" to review expectations for student engagement and interaction.

Step 5 Provide Language Support

Teacher projects "Sentence Starters for Socratic Seminar" or prepares other language support tools to help students speak confidently and academically during the discussion.

Step 6 Select a Discussion Director

Teacher assigns one discussion director who begins the conversation and keeps the group on topic.

Step 7 Begin the Discussion

Students engage in an academic discussion for 30-40 minutes (or longer if they can stay focused). An inside and outside circle or small circles may need to be utilized.

Step 8 Debrief the Discussion

Teacher and students debrief the Socratic Seminar. Discuss the groups' strengths and weaknesses.

Step 9 Close the Socratic Seminar

Students complete a writing task from the "Academic Summary" strategy page as a way to hold all members accountable for the reading and speaking activity.