

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Questions, Questions, Questions

OVERVIEW

A Socratic Seminar is a form of student discussion that uses open-ended, text-based questions for student led dialogue that occurs over 1-2 class periods. In this strategy, students answer a series of questions about a text, formulate questions related to the text, and engage in dialogue with their peers about the questions and text.

For a thorough review of Philosophical Chairs, please revisit the strategy guide provided in the Bronze Current and Controversial Issue Discussion Strategies Course.

Works best when:

- There are a wide array of perspectives
- Students can discuss and question the text to clarify their own understanding of the issue (logos) and how it relates to the lived experience of others (ethos) to build empathy (pathos).
- The prompt is open and allows participants to provide textual evidence and experience to address the prompt and offer additional questions for discussion.
- The topic may be more emotionally charged, as no one is attempting to persuade or compromise with others.

How can this be done in remote learning?

The Socratic Seminar is perhaps the easiest discussion strategy to iterate in virtual learning, provided the right platform. Virtual meeting tools like Zoom, Google Meets, Go To Meeting, Microsoft Teams, etc. can be used to facilitate student discussion.

- Socratic Seminars work best in groups of 15 students or less discussing at one time. In a remote learning environment, consider having students engage in seminars in smaller groups or use the divided class protocol modeled in the course.
 - If you decide to use the divided class model, coaches can have their cameras off and observe their assigned partners' participation, providing feedback on the Socratic Seminar Observation Tool provided in the Strategy Guide. Coaches can then share feedback with their partners:
 - In Breakout Rooms
 - In the Chatbox
 - On a Shared Google Doc
 - In the chatbox
 - A backchannel app like [YoTeach!](#)
- Socratic Seminars can also be iterated on discussion boards. You participated in a Discussion Board Socratic Seminar in the Bronze Badge Course in Module Two using the text from Dr. Diana Hess, [How do Teachers' Political Views Influence Teaching about Controversial Issues?](#)
 - To prepare for your discussion board Socratic Seminar on this text, you were independently assigned to read the article and annotate the text.
 - What information in the text is new? Highlight in yellow information in the text that is pointed and new.



REMOTE LEARNING EDITION

- What information in the text resonates with your current practice? Highlight in pink information in the text that resonates with your current practice and/or thinking.
- What information in the text are you wondering about? Highlight in blue items in the text that you wonder about.
- Next, you were asked to complete three of the sentence starters in your Portfolio of Practice.
 - I wonder about...
 - I am confused about...
 - What does it mean when the author says...
 - Do you think that...
 - How does this connect to...
 - Another thing I would like to know is...
 - Create your own.
- Finally, you were directed to create an original post sharing your most pressing question about the Hess article from the question starters in your portfolio. You were instructed to go beyond simply stating the question. After stating the question, you were asked to give some context and explain the importance of the question in relation to student outcomes, your own lived experiences, and/or other stakeholder concerns (parents, administrators, peers, etc.).
- After you created your initial post, you responded to **TWO** of your peers by:
 - Corroborating their question. Share why this is also something you wondered about or something that was pointed and new to you as well.
 - Replying to their questions. Perhaps the idea of the article they question is one that you highlighted because it was reaffirmed in your practice or prior experience.
 - Asking a follow-up question to clarify your understanding of their perspective and the context of their experience.

This discussion board assignment provided a rich dialogue between participants in which many viewpoints and questions about the common text were shared- similar to a face to face Socratic Seminar.

Related Strategy: Big Paper Talk

Big Paper Talk is a strategy that can be iterated online to meet many of the same goals as the Socratic Seminar. In Big Paper Talk:

1. Students in small groups are given a text (4-6), prompt or image as a stimulus (could be the same or varied).
2. Students silently reflect on the prompt and simultaneously provide questions, comments, and observations.
3. Students then silently respond to the contributions of others in their small group
4. Students then comment on other group's "Big Paper"
5. Students return to their paper and the silence is broken as they discuss what they see on their big paper.
6. Debrief as a large group

Facing History and Ourselves has a [video that demonstrates how Big Paper Talk can be iterated for remote learning.](#)



**Current & Controversial
Issue Discussions**