

## AP Socratic Seminar: An Overview

### Summary

The National Paideia Center, which has developed extensive materials on using seminars in classrooms, defines a Socratic seminar as a **“collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text.”**

### Purpose

The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text. In the Seminar, participants systematically question and examine issues and principles related to particular content, and articulate different points-of-view. The group conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and participation.

### Background

In a Socratic Seminar, the participants carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the discussion. **Good discussions occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas.** The discussion is not about right answers; it is not a debate. Students are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful, manner.

### Your Responsibilities

1. **Prepare questions.** Questions should be open-ended, reflect genuine curiosity, and have no “one right answer”!
2. **Ask questions.** During the discussion, help propel ideas forward by responding to your peers' insights in addition to sharing your own. The following are effective stems for asking questions during the seminar:
  - What puzzles me is...
  - I'd like to talk with people about...
  - I'm confused about...
  - Don't you think this is similar to...
  - Do you agree that the big ideas seem to be...
  - I have questions about...
  - Another point of view is...
  - I think it means...
  - Do you think...
  - What does it mean when the author says...
  - Do you agree that...
3. **Participate.** In the AP English context, your contributions towards a Socratic Seminar will count as a “Product” assignment. You must be present and participate in order to receive credit.
4. **Be respectful.** This should go without saying, but respecting one another's views is essential to having a thoughtful discussion.
5. **Monitor “air time”.** Be sure you are allowing your fellow classmates to share their views; don't monopolize the discussion time. Also consider encouraging your peers who haven't yet shared.
6. **Take risks.** Be courageous when presenting your thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence.