

What is a Socratic Seminar?

~ A Socratic seminar is a type of formal group discussion based on the learning and teaching methods employed by Socrates, who was an ancient Greek philosopher often credited with founding Western philosophy. While most classes are based on lectures intended to directly transmit information from teacher to student, *a Socratic seminar is based more on inquiry and discussion*. Socrates held the idea that it is more effective to help students think for themselves than it is to simply give them information. *A Socratic seminar is, therefore, intended to be a discussion of a specific topic among all of those present rather than a situation in which one teacher gives information to students.*

~ In most cases, a Socratic seminar is focused on the discussion of a text, such as a book or essay. *All participants in the seminar read the text beforehand and come to the seminar prepared to discuss their thoughts on the topic.* Such seminars often take place in a classroom setting, so a teacher is often present to lead the discussion. This leadership, however, is not meant to be in the form of a lecture — the teacher's responsibility is only to guide the discussion to important topics and to ensure that those engaged in the discussion are being fair to each other. Some teachers give their students discussion questions before the seminar to help guide and focus the discussion.

~ The purpose of a Socratic seminar is not simply to make sure that students understand the literal aspects of a given text. Many texts in literature and philosophy address highly complex issues that a simple understanding of the words on the page does not fully address. The texts used in this seminar are to be used only as a foundation for group discussion of the issues presented. Discussion of those issues, particularly when there is controversy, requires intensive reasoning and critical thinking skills. *Frequent participation in such seminars greatly helps students develop reasoning skills that can be helpful in many different parts of one's life.*

<https://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-socratic-seminar.htm>

Preparation Work for Socratic Seminar—Answer the Socratic Seminar questions below. Your document should include each numbered question, with answers in complete sentences using textual support (including page #). Your evidence will not necessarily be a quote, but must be adequately summarized or paraphrased with citation. **You must have specific, detailed answers with textual support to receive full credit, and you must answer all parts of the question. You will turn this document in after the Socratic Seminar (20 points).**

Questions: *(Note these are NOT short answer questions that you can quickly turn to a page in the book to copy a quote in answer. Each requires careful thought and the time necessary to draw appropriate conclusions from the material. Your answers must reflect such effort)*

1. In what way do the Puritan characters (or Puritan society) exemplify hypocrisy? Choose a character and show how that character displays hypocrisy, with examples from the text.
2. Each of the three main adult characters has a different kind of guilt, and each handles his or her guilt differently. Choose one and discuss.
3. What role does light vs. dark play in the novel?
4. How are revenge and forgiveness displayed in the novel?
5. Is *The Scarlet Letter* still relevant today, or is it tied to a specific time or place? Do its lessons still apply today?
6. Consider the major symbols of the novel. How do these symbols tie together the novel's plot and the themes?

During-seminar – (engage as both a participant and a coach) 20 points

The Participants:

- Must support their opinions with evidence from the text
- May speak at any time during the seminar with respect for the other participants
- May refer to other works the class has read if applicable to the text
- May ask relevant questions of other participants

The Coaches:

- Must evaluate the participant's performance during the seminar
- Must provide oral and written feedback to the participant after the seminar
- May not speak to their participants during the seminar
- May not speak to other participants or coaches during the seminar

In Class Guidelines:

- ✓ Come prepared with your annotated text and your prep work
- ✓ Be an active listener and speaker. Contribute to the discussion
 - No side discussions
 - No talking over each other
 - Monitor your own “air time” (aka don’t dominate the discussion)
 - One Voice - only one person can speak at one time
- ✓ Be respectful (even if you do not agree)
- ✓ Use evidence or examples from your reading
 - You must back up statements with textual evidence (with specific page numbers)
 - Explain your answers - a simple yes or no is not acceptable you must explain
- ✓ Address each other by name and use “I” phrases
 - I agree with _____ because _____
 - I disagree with _____ because _____
- ✓ Anyone may ask questions of the group at any time. Talk to the group, not to the teacher.