

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Sarah Bassett's Demonstration Lesson ---

Title of lesson: Socratic Seminar Discussions

Suggested grade/age: High School or Middle School, but could easily be adapted for Elementary students.

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: Pre-seminar setup takes approximately 20 minutes, Seminar time is flexible to fit class time, 5-10 minute post-seminar reflection

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

(Why is this lesson important in the development of your students' skills or knowledge? What do you want students to learn or be able to do? What "best practice" does this lesson incorporate?)

Socratic Seminars help students have valuable, evidence-based discussions with their peers. It also helps scaffold the process with a pre-seminar activity, class goals and personal goals, a note-taking sheet, talking chips, and a post-seminar reflection. Seminars are empowering for students because they are responsible for making meaning, asking questions, and running the discussion as equal partners in learning with the teacher instead of passive observers. Since Seminars can be run in a class on any topic, it's the ultimate flexible activity.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

(What steps do you take to implement this lesson in your classroom? Where is this lesson located in the school year or unit—beginning, middle, end? Does this lesson scaffold or build to a culminating assessment or demonstration of learning?)

Since a Socratic Seminar could be run at any time on any topic, it can fit anywhere. Here's a brief overview of what it would look like:

- Pre-seminar activity, usually a reading and a few general questions (could be completed the day before or for homework)
- Go over expectations (general or about talking chips if you're using them) of the Seminar (this will take longer the first few times you have Seminars, but less as you do them more often with students)
- Goal-setting with class and personal goals (5 minutes)
- Seminar (flexible time to fit the needs of the class period)
- Post-seminar reflection (5-10 minutes at the end of class)

Related Resources:

(What technology, articles, books, or supplies do you recommend?)

Socraticseminars.com for trainings

Socratic Circles by Copeland - just one of many texts on Socratic Seminars

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- With ANY text and at any point of the reading (before, during, or after)
- With multiple texts
- Framing the Seminar with an essential question
- Framing the Seminar around a standard
- Using the Seminar to brainstorm as a class for a writing assignment by generating ideas, troubling an idea, etc.
- Different set-up models: fishbowl, inner circle/outer circle, two Seminars happening at once, etc.

For additional information, contact:

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