

Socratic Seminars



BUILDING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Walker Asserson
Social Studies Teacher, BHS
`walker.asserson@bsd7.org`

Socratic Seminars



- What are they?
- Why are they appropriate for building 21st century skills in gifted students?
- How can they be implemented?



What are Socratic seminars?



Socrates



- Greek philosopher/educator 469-399 BC
- Sentenced to death by Athenian authorities for 'corrupting' the minds of the youth
- Accepted the sentence and died by ingesting poison
- Plato's teacher and mentor
- Socratic method: pedagogy in which a series of questions are asked to draw forth answers and, more importantly, encourage essential insights

Socratic Questioning



- **Probing implications and consequences**
 - Then what would happen?
 - Why is ... important?
- **Conceptual clarification**
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Why are you saying that?
- **Questioning perspectives**
 - What alternative ways of looking at this are there?
 - Who benefits from this?
- **Probing assumptions**
 - How can you verify or disprove that assumption?
 - Do you agree or disagree with...?
- **Probing rationale, reasons and evidence**
 - Why is that happening?
 - How do you know this?
- **Questions about the question**
 - What was the point of asking that question?
- **Source:**
http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm

Four Elements of a Socratic Seminar



1. The text may be readings (poems, short story, essay or document) from any discipline or works of art or music
2. The leader poses the focus question and then serves in a dual role as leader and participant.
3. The questions are high level, often student generated, and reflect genuine curiosity.
4. Participants study the text in advance, listen actively, share their ideas, and find evidence in the text to support their beliefs.

Dodge, Judith. (2005). *Differentiation in action*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

Versatile



- **Class Size:** 8-30
- **Students:** Mixed ability or homogenous gifted
- **Grade-level:** 7-12
- **Subject:** Anything with thought-provoking reading

What My Seminars Look Like



Pre

Provocative
Reading

Teach
Questioning

Teach Protocol

During

Physical Space

Inner/Outer
Circles

Student-led
Discussion

Monitor

Post

Debrief

Self-evaluations

Differentiate



- Roles include:
 - Discussion leader
 - Discussion participant
 - Active listener
 - Deep thinker
- Teacher assigns discussion participants and students volunteer for the rest

Why are Socratic seminars appropriate for building 21st century skills in gifted students?



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What did they say?



- 2 – Doesn't work if reading isn't interesting
- 4 – Doesn't work if students aren't prepared
- 5 – They challenge me to get more involved and/or express myself more
- 7 – Like hearing different opinions and perspectives
- 10 – They challenge me to think more deeply and/or understand more

Some Traits of Gifted Students

- **Deep Thinkers...** enjoy contemplation, not just directly solving problems. Make connections with prior learning.
- **Tolerance for Ambiguity...** comfortable in situations without clear answers. Might relish the messiness.
- **Flexibility...** enjoy looking at material from a variety of perspectives
- **Love of Learning**

Rogers, Karen B. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child.* Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.

21st Century Skills



- Created by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills in conjunction with the National Council for the Social Studies
 - Published in 2008
 - www.21stcenturyskills.org
- Total: 37 skills in 12 categories
- Socratic seminars address 11 specific skills in 7 categories

21st Century Skills



- **Creativity and Innovation**
 - Developing, implementing and communicating new ideas to others
 - Being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives
- **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**
 - Identifying and asking significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions

21st Century Skills



- **Communication**

- Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively through speaking and writing

- **Flexibility and Adaptability**

- Adapting to varied roles and responsibilities
- Working effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities

21st Century Skills



- **Initiative and Self Direction**
 - Going beyond basic mastery of skills and/or curriculum to explore and expand one's own learning and opportunities to gain expertise
- **Social and Cross-Cultural Skills**
 - Working appropriately and productively with others
 - Leveraging the collective intelligence of groups when appropriate

21st Century Skills



- **Leadership and Responsibility**
 - Using interpersonal and problem-solving skills to influence and guide others towards a goal
 - Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind

List A



- Protocol Focus – *How* to have an intellectual discussion
 - Developing, implementing and communicating new ideas to others
 - Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively through speaking and writing
 - Adapting to varied roles and responsibilities
 - Working appropriately and productively with others
 - Using interpersonal and problem-solving skills to influence and guide others towards a goal
 - Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind

List B



- **Content Focus – What to do with the intellectual content of the conversation**
 - Being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives
 - Identifying and asking significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions
 - Working effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities
 - Going beyond basic mastery of skills and/or curriculum to explore and expand one's own learning and opportunities to gain expertise
 - Leveraging the collective intelligence of groups when appropriate



**How can
Socratic
seminars be
effectively
implemented?**



Effective Implementation



- 1. Spend 30-50 minutes in advance explaining protocol and Socratic questioning
- 2. Have students take notes on the reading in the format of “3 Quotes, 3 Comments, 3 Questions”
 - Make sure they write the page and paragraph #s
- 3. Ask for two volunteers to be student leaders

Effective Implementation



- 4. Maximize discussion time: organize inner and outer groups in advance and arrange physical space in advance
 - Give the inner group the self-grading rubrics
 - What does the outer group do?
 - ✦ Tally sheet
 - ✦ Oval
 - ✦ Partner rubric
 - ✦ Deepest thoughts (3 quotes)

Effective Implementation



- 5. Include a “Hot Seat”
- 6. ‘Five Pennies’ technique for talkative groups
- 6. Save time at the end for the self-grade rubric
- 7. Debrief the last 10 minutes or at the beginning of class the next day.
 - Review the work of the outer group
 - Add your own thoughts

Final Tips



- Use them semi-regularly
 - Recommendations:
 - ✦ 1. Do them in pairs (to switch inner/outer groups)
 - ✦ 2. The first time you do them plan to do a second pair within a couple of weeks of the first
 - ✦ 3. Be prepared to be blown away

Final Tips



- Day 1

- Introduce the reading and the Socratic seminar format; Assign ‘3 Quotes, 3 Comments, 3 Question’

- Day 2

- Depending on the length of the reading, this may come immediately following Day 1 or several days later (give them time to read the material before this lesson); Introduce the ‘What Are Socratic Seminars’ page; Go over the Self-grade Rubric (give each student a copy) and the outer circle options

- Day 3

- Prearrange the desks; Assign students to the inner or outer circles and assign outer circle roles; Have the Socratic seminar; Debrief, or debrief the following day