**Socratic Seminar Overview**

A Socratic seminar is: 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. The group conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through 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. You are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful, manner.

**Classroom Environment**

The classroom will be arranged so that you can look at each other directly: circle or square. You will follow these “rules” for discussion:

* Don’t raise hands
* Listen carefully
* Address one another respectfully
* Base any opinions on the text
* Address comments to the group (no side conversations)
* Use sensitivity to take turns and not interrupt others
* Balance talking and listening
* Be courageous in presenting your own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence

**Questions**

Some question will be prepared in advance, but you should also bring to class. Questions should lead participants into the core ideas and values and to the use of the text in their answers.

Questions must be open-ended, reflect genuine curiosity, and have no ‘one right answer’!

Sample discussion questions:

* What is the main idea or underlying value in the text?
* What is the author’s purpose or perspective?
* What does (a particular phrase) mean?

Sample questions to move the discussion along:

* Who has a different perspective?
* Who has not yet had a chance to speak?
* Where do you find evidence for that in the text?
* Can you clarify what you mean by that?
* How does that relate to what (someone else) said?
* Is there something in the text that is unclear to you?
* Has anyone changed their mind?

Sample questions to bring the discussion to an end:

* How do the ideas in the text relate to our lives?
* What do they mean for us personally?
* Why is this material important?
* Is it right that....?
* Do you agree with the author?

Sample debriefing questions:

* Do you feel like you understand the text at a deeper level?
* How was the process for us?
* Did we adhere to our “rules”?
* Did you achieve your goals to participate?
* What was one thing you noticed about the seminar?