

Socratic Circle

Description

A Socratic circle (also called by alternate names, such as Socratic seminar and paideia) is an approach to discussion that allows students to build off each other's ideas as well as to develop listening and speaking and critical thinking skills.

Materials

- Questions prepared by the teacher, about 3 per group (usually there are 2, sometimes 3 groups)
- Questions can be grand-scale (what is the purpose of education?) or specific to a text (what aspects of the Hellgate Treaty have changed since 1855?)

Procedure

1. Split the class into even groups of no more than 8 students. If you have a large class, you can use 3 groups and have one out of rotation at all times. For the purposes of this description, two groups will be used.
2. Place enough chairs for one group in a circle with ample space in the center. The inner circle sits on the floor, in the center. The outer circle sits in chairs.
3. The rules are – stick to the question. Use your text, your notes, your experiences and your thoughts to support your ideas. The outer circle must not speak while the inner circle is “on.”
4. Allow 8-10 minutes for the inner circle. Participate as the teacher only to ask another question or re-focus them if necessary. Stay out of it completely, if possible.
5. After the inner circle is done, have the outer circle comment on the inner circle's successes. They should discuss *how* the inner circle functioned, not what they talked about. They might offer suggestions, comment on interruptions or silences, or focus on a specific aspect of listening/speaking skills that you have prepared them to watch. 2-3 minutes is sufficient for this discussion.
6. The groups switch places for round two.

Considerations

- Grading: you may wish to grade the Socratic circle based on participation, or you may decide that less pressure will lead to greater results.
- Consider asking different questions of each group, or if one question provoked much discussion and there's clearly more to be said, allow the second group to pick up where the first group left off.

