Socrates and Socratic Seminars

The most interesting and influential thinker in the fifth century was Socrates, whose dedication to careful reasoning transformed the entire enterprise. He sought genuine knowledge rather than mere victory over an opponent, the pursuit of truth. Socrates’ aim was to make people examine everything. And in the end, Athens’s leaders felt that he had become a danger to the state. Ultimately 501 men found him guilty of not believing in the state-approved gods and leading young people astray with his teaching. Thus, his willingness to call everything into question and his determination to accept nothing less than an adequate account of the nature of things makes him the first clear exponent of critical philosophy. He ultimately drank poison and ended his life.

Procedures

The Socratic Discussion is patterned after the way Socrates conducted learning activities in Ancient Greece. All of his students were expected to share their thoughts and opinions regarding the written and spoken word. Students were further required to read, analyze and evaluate assigned materials prior to class discussion. Socrates remained silent to allow true discussion to flow from his students. Today, when a class is conducted using the Socratic Discussion method, students are also required to come prepared to discuss assigned materials and share ideas and opinions, using the text or real life experience to back up their answers.

How to earn credit?

1. Come prepared  Annotation of the text
2. Be Present on the day of the Socratic Seminar (1/31-2/1)  Dialogue
3. Participate in the discussion (you will receive pts. according to participation)  Debriefing
4. Write a well thought out reflection on the seminar. Rubric assessment/ Writing assignment

Socratic Seminar Guidelines

1. Speak up so that all can hear you
2. Talk to each other and not just the lead or teacher
3. Do not stay confused. Ask questions for clarification.
4. Listen Carefully
5. Do not participate if you are not prepared
6. Refer to the text to find evidence to support what you say.
7. Stick to the point. Don’t change the subject simply because you came up with a great idea. Make notes on your thoughts, if necessary, and come back to it later.
8. Do not raise hands; take turns speaking
9. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don’t know it or admit it.
10. It’s OK to pass

Reflection Questions

1. Did the participants:
   a. dig below the surface meaning?
   b. speak loudly and clearly?
   c. Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
   d. Use the text to find support?
   e. Listen to others respectfully?
   f. Stick with the subject?
   g. Talk to each other and not just the leader?
   h. Paraphrase accurately?
   i. Avoid inappropriate language?
   j. Ask for help to clear confusion?
   k. Support each other?
   l. Avoid hostile exchanges?
   m. Question others in a civil manner?
   n. Seem prepared?
   o. Make sure questions were understood?
2. Name Specific people who did one or more of the above criteria well. Explain.
3. What was the most interesting question asked? Why was it interesting to you?
4. What was the most interesting idea to come from a participant? Why was it interesting to you?
5. What was the best thing you observed? Explain.
6. What was the most troubling thing you observed? Explain. How could it be corrected or improved?
7. Rate your own participation, what did you do well, what do you hope to do next time differently?
Once there was a tree. . . and she loved a little boy. And every day the boy would come and he would gather her leaves and make them into crowns and play king of the forest. He would climb up her trunk and swing from her branches and eat her apples. And they would play hide-and-go-seek. And when he was tired, he would sleep in her shade. And the boy loved the tree . . . very much. And the tree was happy.

But time went by. And the boy grew older. And the tree was often alone. Then one day the boy came to the tree and the tree said, “Come, Boy, come climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and eat my apples and play in my shade and be happy.” “I am too big to climb and play,” said the boy. “I want to buy things and have fun. I want some money. Can you give me some money?” “I’m sorry,” said the tree, “but I have no money. I have only leaves and apples. Take my apples, Boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy.” And so they boy climbed up the tree and gathered her apples and carried them away. And the tree was happy.

But the boy stayed away for a long time . . . and the tree was sad. And then one day the boy came back and the tree shook with joy and she said, “Come, Boy. Climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and be happy.” “I am too busy to climb trees,” said the boy. “I want a house to keep me warm,” he said. “I want a wife and I want children, and so I need a house. Can you give me a house?” “I have no house,” said the tree. “The forest is my house, but you can cut off my branches and build a house. Then you will be happy.” And so the boy cut off her branches and carried them away to build his house. And the tree was happy.

But the boy stayed away for a long time. And when he came back, the tree was so happy she could hardly speak. “Come, Boy,” she whispered, “come and play.” “I am too old and sad to play,” said the boy. “I want a boat that will take me far away from here. Can you give me a boat?” “Cut down my trunk and make a boat,” said the tree. “Then you can sail away . . . and be happy.” And so the boy cut down her trunk and made a boat and sailed away. And the tree was happy . . . but not really.

And after a long while the boy came back again. “I am sorry, Boy,” said the tree, “but I have nothing left to give you—My apples are gone.” “My teeth are too weak for apples,” said the boy. “My branches are gone,” said the tree. “You cannot swing on them—” “I am too old to swing on branches,” said the boy. “My trunk is gone” said the tree. “You cannot climb—” “I am too tired to climb” said the boy. “I am sorry,” sighed the tree. “I wish that I could give you something . . . but I have nothing left. I am just an old stump. I am sorry . . . ” “I don’t need very much now,” said the boy, “just a quiet place to sit and rest. I am very tired.” “Well, said the tree, straightening herself up as much as she could, “well, an old stump is good for sitting and resting. Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest.” And the boy did. And the tree was happy.

The End.

**Annotate the following story** Here are some questions to help you get started . . . If all else fails T.W.I.S.T. it!!

What is the true relationship of the tree and the boy? How is this displayed? What is the moral of this story? Why does the tree continue to help the boy? Why does the boy continue to ask for help from the tree? Is the boy happy? Is the tree happy?