Socratic Seminar

Directions
Named for the Greek philosopher, this discussion strategy emphasizes critical thinking and questioning. The facilitator poses a series of open-ended questions related to a central topic. Students engage in dialogue, practice active listening, defend their claims, and present counterclaims.

1. Divide the class into groups of three to five students.
2. Give each group a list of questions.
3. Have students discuss the questions within their groups and record their ideas.
4. Instruct each group to come up with one question of their own to bring with them into the seminar.
5. Begin the seminar once small-group discussions have ended. Place as many chairs as there are groups in a circle in the center of the room.
6. Instruct each group to send a representative to the center. The representatives bring their notes and ideas from the group.
7. Once the representatives are seated, allow students to drive the discussion. A “talking piece,” like a ball or stick, can be used to designate the speaker who has the floor.
8. Students in the circle address the list of questions and pose new ones they generated with their groups.
9. Students should listen and respond to one another’s views and ask questions to determine if they agree or disagree.
10. Facilitate the discussion by reminding students when to clarify their statements or when important points have been missed.
11. Students outside the center can take notes on the discussion.
12. At any time during the seminar, a group member can tap out their representative and switch places. You might want to require that each group tap out someone at least once and encourage groups to put in every member.
13. Close by having students summarize the discussion. Ask if they learned anything new or will think about the topic differently now.