

**Elements of a
SOCRATIC SEMINAR**

THE TEXT

Socratic Seminar text (essays, poetry, stories, art, etc) are chosen for their richness in ideas, issues, values and their ability to stimulate extended, thoughtful dialogue. A good text will raise important questions in the participants' minds. Often these questions will have no right or wrong answer. The goal is to *explore ideas*, not find the "right answer". At the end of a successful Socratic Seminar, participants often leave with more questions than they brought with them.

THE QUESTION

A Socratic Seminar opens with a question posed by the leader or students after they have more experience with seminars. An opening question has no right answer; instead it reflects the curiosity of the person asking. A good opening question leads participants back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define and clarify the issues involved. Responses to the opening question generate new questions from the participants, leading to new responses. The discussion is guided by what people say, rather than what the leader wants to talk about.

THE PARTICIPANTS

In Socratic Seminar, participants share with the leader the responsibility for the quality of the seminar. Good seminars 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 LEADER

In Socratic Seminar, the leader plays a dual role as leader and participant. The seminar leader consciously demonstrates habits of mind that lead to thoughtful exploration of the ideas in the text. The leader will keep participants focused on the text, ask follow-up questions, help participants clarify their positions, and involve reluctant participants in the discussion.