

Thinking to Learn the Socratic Way

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Strengthening thinking to learn behaviors is non-negotiable for educators. Not all students come to school equally prepared to learn academically, so a culture of thinking must be developed. One method in which students can engage in learning and thinking is through Socratic conversation. Teachers engage students by asking questions that create or produce new understanding. Conversations are collaborative and void of judgment.

Using the process of Socratic questioning, teachers facilitate conversations to extend or deepen thinking within students. Varied concepts are presented such as themes, metaphors, characters' actions, motives, or authors' styles and techniques. Teachers might assign a text to be read prior to Socratic conversations. Open-ended questions about the text are developed and asked by the teacher, encouraging students to use textual evidence to support given responses. The interactions among students enable them to examine individual opinions and beliefs as well as seek knowledge.

Several group formats can be used when utilizing Socratic conversations.

- 4 to 2 – Groups of four engage in conversations, and then move to partners to process the shared information.
- 2 to 4 – Partners have conversations, and then form groups of four to engage in further conversation to process shared information.
- Inner/Outer Circles – An outer group silently observes an inner circle of students as they collaborate to construct meaning about the text. Afterwards, the outer group provides feedback. Then the groups switch roles and repeat the process.

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Students are informed that questions facilitate respectful dialogue and have no single correct response. Students are invited to form personal connections with the text and the world outside of school. Some questions might ask students to share similar or different experiences as those in the text. The teacher might also ask students to clarify their perspectives and use supporting textual evidence. Other questions challenge students to form comparisons, provide cause-and-effect relationships, and state reasons the text could be realistic or unrealistic, comparing it to everyday life. Questioning prompts may be posted in classrooms or given to students to establish routines where both teachers and students ask questions. Socratic conversations demonstrate the importance of students working cooperatively to construct meaning without focusing on a single interpretation. Thus, students are led to explore information, process information, and form a deeper understanding when Socratic questioning is emphasized.

● Clarification Prompts

- Do you see gaps in ___ reasoning?
- I'm not sure I understand ___.
- Tell me more about ___.
- What makes you think ___?

● Evidence Prompts

- Can you give an example of ___?
- How do you see ___ in everyday life?
- What evidence/reasons can you give ___?
- Where in the text ___?
- Why did the author ___?

● Cause and Effect Prompts

- Do you think ___ could happen again?
Why or why not?
- How could that have been prevented?
- What are some reasons ___?
- Why do you think ___ happened?

● Compare/Contrast Prompts

- How are ___ and ___ alike/different?
- How does ___ remind you of ___?
- What is ___ similar to?

● Perspective Prompts

- ___ expressed a different opinion. Are there others?
- Can you describe a situation that would ___?
- Do you have a different conclusion?
- Do you have a different interpretation?
- How might ___ have felt ___?
- Suppose ___. Would that still be true?
Why or why not?
- What do you think ___ was thinking when ___?
- Would that still happen if ___?

● Personal Experience Prompts

- Has anyone else had a similar ___?
- Has anything like ___ ever happened to you?
- In what way are you alike/different from ___?
- What are some of the reasons this was/was not a good idea?
- What better choices do you think could be made?
- What do you wonder about?
- What would you do if you ___?
- Who has a different ___?



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