

Reigniting Reading Through Socratic Seminar-Literature Circle Model

Overview of Classroom Teacher and the Teacher Librarian
Collaboration: Virginia Hand National Education Summit- 2026

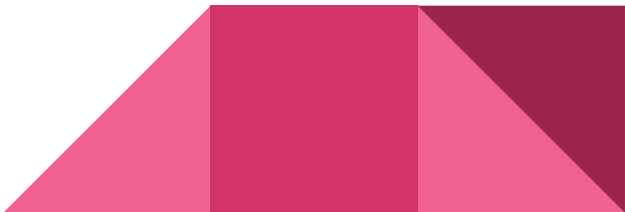
Overview

Engaging adolescents in reading is about more than literacy—it is about building curiosity, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of learning.

Research shows that when students are given voice, choice, and meaningful opportunities to discuss texts, their motivation and engagement increase.

Strategies such as literature circles and Socratic discussions support deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and student ownership of learning

(Webber, 2023).



The What:

Focus: Socratic Literature Discussions -Global Issues Unit. Collaboration between G8 teacher and Teacher Librarian

Socratic Literature Circles are structured, student-led discussions where learners explore texts through questioning, dialogue, and critical thinking, using evidence to share and justify ideas (Briggs, 2014)

*The Greek philosopher and teacher **Socrates** (ca 470- 399 BCE) was convinced the way to gain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation. He called this method 'dialectic', which means the art of examining opinions or ideas logically, often by the method of question and answer so as to determine their validity.*

Learning how to ask questions should be considered as critical as learning to read, write and do basic maths.

(Briggs. S, 2014)

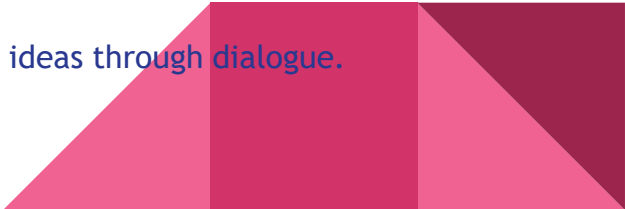


The Why: Rationale

Why

- There was a noticeable decline in student engagement during traditional literature circle discussions.
- Reflection on current practice between the teacher librarian and Grade 8 English teacher highlighted the need for a more student-driven discussion model.
- Research into alternative discussion approaches led to the selection of the Socratic discussion model.
- The intention was to deepen students' critical analysis of texts and improve the quality of discussion and participation.

Purpose

- To increase student engagement in literature discussions.
 - To develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills.
 - To strengthen students' oral language and discussion skills.
 - To encourage students to independently question, clarify, justify, and extend ideas through dialogue.
 - To support assessment of:
 - Criterion A: Critical thinking and analysis
 - Criterion D: Using language discussion skills
- 

The How: Planning

- Teacher librarian and Grade 8 language/Literature teacher research the Socratic model
- Develop sequence series of lessons introducing the purpose and structure of the Socratic Seminar model, including the six types of Socratic questions, scaffolded question stems, and clarity around student roles and expectations.
- Plan and schedule library inquiry sessions for students to research and critically explore global issues connected to social, political, cultural, and historical contexts within literature: Context for Socratic discussions & Literature response strategies
- Schedule & embed ongoing Teacher Librarian and classroom teacher collaboration through regular planning and reflection meetings between lessons to review student progress, discussion quality, and inquiry development throughout the unit



Resourcing

- Selected four texts for students choice related to the global issues: Ana's Story, Revolution is not a Dinner Party, The Diary of Anne Frank and A long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier
 - Divided the books into sections for reading requirements in preparation for each discussion.
 - Preparing Socratic Seminar prompts for students
- RESEARCH CONTEXT FOR DISCUSSIONS & reader response:**
- Curating print and electronic resources related to novels and global issues into a Library Guide



Book Talking

Highlight sections to read from each book and create book recommendation script to help students with their book choices.

Revolution Is Not A Dinner Party

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z11yeGGuXII>

Ana's story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CxqZNLnSoY>

A Long Way gone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzPpPC0NGLE>

Diary of Anne Frank

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CxqZNLnSoY>



Teaching

- G8 Language and Literature Teacher and teacher librarian co-taught each lesson.
- In order for students to research their context and background information related to their global issue the Teacher Librarian explicitly taught and modeled research skills based on Big6 Model: Task Definition, Information Seeking Strategies, Access and Location, Use of Information, Synthesis and Evaluation.
- Mini Lessons: Eg Questioning techniques, Discussion Roles and Responsibilities
- Group and Individual progress check ins

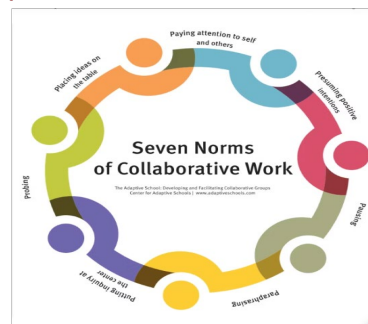


Preparing Students for Discussion

Meaningful Socratic discussion does not happen spontaneously. Students needed **explicit modelling, scaffolding, and structured practice** before they could engage in substantive dialogue. A series of targeted mini-lessons was delivered collaboratively before and throughout the unit.

Mini-Lessons Included

- Discussion roles and responsibilities
- Active listening and respectful disagreement
- Socratic questioning techniques
- Building evidence-based responses
- Connecting literature to wider global contexts



7 Norms of Collaboration :The Seven Norms of Collaboration, developed by Garmston and Wellman, are behaviors that foster effective group work and productive dialogue, including

- Pausing :Paraphrasing :Posing Questions : Putting Ideas on the Table
- Providing Data :Paying Attention to Self and Others :Presuming Positive Intentions
- The 7 Norms of Collaboration (Garmston & Wellman) were explicitly taught and displayed during discussions. They gave students a shared language for respectful, productive dialogue — and helped create a discussion culture where all voices

Leader:

- Begins discussion with open question
- facilitates and participates
- Must know the text well enough to anticipate misconceptions.
- Must allow the group to come to its own understanding.

Participant guidelines

1. Refer to text when needed. This is not a test of memory. Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues and values reflected in the text.
2. It's okay to pass when asked to contribute.
3. Do not stay confused, ask for clarification
4. Stick to the point currently under discussion, take notes on ideas you wish to come back to.
5. Don't raise hands, take turns speaking.
6. Listen carefully.
7. Speak up so all can hear.
8. Talk to each other, not just to the leader.
9. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinion.
10. YOU are responsible for the discussion.

The Six Types of Socratic Questions for participants

Questions for **clarification**: Why do you say that? How does this relate to our discussion?

Questions that **probe questions**: What could we assume instead? How can you verify or disprove that assumption?

Questions that probe **reasons and evidence**: What would be an example? What do you think causes to happen? Why?



The Six Types of Socratic Questions (Cont)

Questions about **viewpoints and perspectives**: What would be an alternative? What is another way to look at it? Why is it best? Would you explain why it is necessary or beneficial and who benefits? What are the strengths and weaknesses?

Questions that probe **implications and consequences**: What generalizations can you make? What are the consequences of that assumption? What are you implying? How does that affect?

Questions about the question: What was the point of this question? Why do you think I asked this question? What does...mean? How does .. apply to everyday life?

Facilitating

- Facilitating small group Socratic discussions
- Modeling the different types of Socratic questioning techniques in context of the novel.
- Scaffolding the discussions and removing scaffolds as members became more confident with technique.
- Using the seven norms of collaboration to assist in guiding the discussions.
- Modeling finding evidence to support the point being made using stickies and reflection journal: PEA
- Recording information from each group member



Reading Requirements for Socratic Discussions

	Socratic discussion #1 Due:	Socratic discussion #2 Due:	Socratic discussion #3 Due:	Socratic discussion #4 Due:	Socratic discussion #5 Due:	Socratic discussion #6 Due:
Ana's Story	Pgs 1-40	Pgs 40 - 80	Pgs 81- 120	<u>Pgs121 -159</u>	Pgs 160-201	Pgs 202-243
Diary of Anne Frank	Pgs 1 - 38	Pgs 39 - 76	Pgs 76 - 113	Pgs 114-150	Pgs 150-190	Pgs 191-229
A Long Way Gone	Pgs 1 - 34	Pgs 35 - 68	Pgs 69 - 110	Pgs 111-151	Pgs 152 -185	Pgs 186-218
Revolution is not a dinner party	Pgs 5 - 50	Pgs 50 - 100	Pgs 103-138	Pgs 139-172	Pgs 175 -211	Pgs 212- 248

Assessing & Recording

- Recording individual members discussion points, questioning techniques and ability to use language through anecdotal notes on the Global Issues Discussion Anecdotal Grid.
- Cross referencing with the Criterion A: Understanding Text: Analysis & Criterion D: Using Language
- Providing oral feedback at the end of each Socratic discussion to individual group members.
- Formative feedback at the end of each discussion recorded on Edumate
- Final Summative discussion: Grade and comment recorded on Edumate



Global Issues Socratic Discussion Anecdotal- Key

Criterion A - Analysing WHAT (answers and questions)	Criterion D - Using Language HOW
<u>Putting ideas on the table:</u> -Tally no of times students answers and asks questions -Understanding shown: <i>L-literal (retells events from book)</i> <i>I-Inference (makes basic inferences, connections)</i> <i>E-Evaluative (strong inferences, cause and effect, worth, compare and contrast, appropriateness)</i> <i>A-Analytical (Big ideas beyond the book, concepts, themes, imagery)</i> <u>Providing data</u> -uses insightful and appropriate evidence from text	<u>Paying attention to self and others</u> -always uses thinking stems -consistently uses appropriate discussion skills: <i>Para-paraphrasing, Pig-piggybacking, C-clarifying, E-encouraging</i>

Name	Anecdotal evidence	Grade

G8 Socratic discussion Rubric: You are showing your thinking through the questions you ask

Understanding text Criteria A: Analysing <i>Putting Ideas on the table:</i> -responds to three questions -uses probing questions appropriately three times during discussion -shows analytical understanding of perspectives of Global Issue e.g. big ideas, universal concepts, themes, implications, consequences Contributes ideas that extend and stimulate the discussion <i>Providing data</i>	Speak in an appropriate style for a discussion Criteria D: Using Language <i>Paying attention to self and others</i> -always uses thinking stems - expresses thinking fully, speaks with expressive vocabulary sentences, using vocabulary from text - does not interrupt others, encourages others to participate -consistently uses appropriate discussion skills e.g. paraphrasing, piggybacking, clarifying, pausing, encouraging
-uses insightful and appropriate evidence from text to support ideas contributed during discussion (Strong evidence of stickies)	

Creative Response Through Inquiry

Students move from structured discussion to personal interpretation through inquiry, reflection, and creative response.

Sequence :1. Inquiry & Context

Historical & cultural research; critical literacy skills

2. Literature Circles & Socratic Dialogue

Text analysis; collaborative discussion; multiple perspectives

3. Synthesis & Reflection

Connecting ideas across texts and discussion; personal meaning-making

4. Creative Response (Choice)

Rewrite a scene from a marginalised perspective; monologue or spoken word:

Students rewrite a scene from a different, less-heard viewpoint and present it as a speech or performance piece.



The Power of Collaborative Inquiry

"The goal is not to give students all the answers, but to empower them to ask better questions."

Inquiry Thrives Through Collaboration

The Teacher Librarian is an instructional partner — not a support role. Co-planning and co-teaching transformed what was possible for students.

Structure Enables Voice

Socratic discussion frameworks, the 7 Norms, and explicit questioning instruction gave every student the tools to participate with confidence and depth.

Literature and Research Together

When students read powerful texts *and* research the world behind them, their discussions become richer, more informed, and genuinely transformative.

Student Voice Is Learnable

Given time, scaffolding, and references, Grade 8 students can express in sophisticated intellectual discourse — and even to love it.

Student Impact and Outcomes

Across the unit, students demonstrated measurable growth — not just in literary understanding, but in the thinking dispositions that underpin lifelong learning. The combination of literature, structured research, and Socratic dialogue created the conditions for genuine intellectual development.

Higher-Order Thinking

Students moved from recall to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of complex global issues.

Confident Discussion

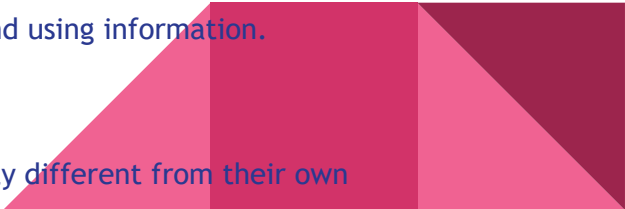
Students increasingly questioned one another, built on peer responses, and challenged ideas with evidence.

Research Independence

Guided by the Big6 model, students developed transferable skills in locating, evaluating, and using information.

Empathy and Perspective

Literature and dialogue opened space for students to understand lives and contexts radically different from their own



Reflecting & Innovating

- Reflecting with Grade 8 language and literature teacher throughout the process.
- Modifying as a result of reflection and analysing the formative data e.g. decision to withdraw scaffolds for summative discussion and teacher not as facilitators but recorder.
- Analysing the data against previous literature discussion and
- Reflecting with students based on the video.
- SWOT analysis of the Socratic discussions.
- Reflection survey to grade 8 students
- Analyse results and SWOT analysis
- Introduce the Socratic discussion to grade seven students



Socratic Seminar

What it should look like...	What it shouldn't look like...
- o Text-focused conversation (not speculative) - o A natural flow among students and ideas - o Students prepared with notes and books - o Eye contact, body facing speaker and clearly engaged - o Honoring diversity of opinions - o Awkward silences that are accepted as a natural part of process - o Acknowledging and building on previous comments - o Staying focused on text - o Intentional teacher intervention tactics such as muting, redirection - o Students taking turns as vocal leaders, facilitators, and/or intermittent participants - o Being attentive to each other, calling on quiet voices, making dominant voices wait	- o Dominating voices - o Interrupting peers - o Treating it as a debate, trying to win and/or prove point - o Resistant voices - o Side conversations - o Fiddling with phone, book, looking down, slouching - o Plot summary - o Ignoring who has participated and who has not - o Discouraging comments, humor, and/or body language - o Changing topics before students have had the chance to participate

Additional Resources

Alexander, R. (2008). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk* (4th ed.). Dialogos.

Briggs, S. (2014). *25 ways to institute inquiry-based learning in the classroom*. TeachThought.

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (2012). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Costa, A. L., & Garmston, R. J. (2016). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield. Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2014). *Dispositions: Reframing teaching and learning*. Corwin Press.

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups* (2nd ed.). Stenhouse Publishers.

Eisenberg, M. B., & Berkowitz, R. E. (1990). *Information problem-solving: The Big Six Skills approach to library & information skills instruction*. Ablex Publishing.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (Expanded 2nd ed.).



Contact Details

Thank you all for listening:

Feel free to contact me

Virginia Hand

Shellharbour Anglican College

[vhand @shac.nsw.edu](mailto:vhand@shac.nsw.edu)



The Socratic Discussion Model

The Socratic model: Adaptation of the previous literature circle structure.

- Discussions to become more student-led, with students examining ideas through questioning rather than relying on teacher direction.
- The teacher librarian & Year 8 teacher to act as a facilitator and observer rather than discussion leader.
- Students participate in repeated rounds of Socratic discussions to build familiarity and confidence.
- Assessment rubrics and anecdotal records adapted to align with Socratic discussion behaviours such as:
 - questioning
 - clarifying
 - piggybacking on ideas
 - critical responses
- Observation, reflection, and assessment data to be collected to evaluate the impact on engagement and discussion quality.

