

# American Dream - Dead or Alive

## Socratic Seminar for *The Great Gatsby*

"The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable **students to think for themselves** than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by **responding to their questions with questions**, instead of answers. This process encourages **divergent thinking rather than convergent thinking**" (Adams).

"Socratic questioning recognizes that **questions, not answers, are the driving force in thinking**. Socratic seminars explore ideas, values, and issues drawn from readings or art works chosen for their richness. They also provide a forum to expand participants' familiarity with works drawn from many cultural sources. Leaders help participants to make sense of a text and of their own thinking by asking questions about reasoning, evidence, connections, examples, and other aspects of sound thinking. A **good seminar is more devoted to making meaning than to mastering information**. Seminars strengthen participants' learning by getting them actively engaged in rigorous critical thought. Practical activities are always followed by periods of reflection and discussion about what has been experienced. The goal here is to allow learners to create a community of inquiry for the purpose of making meaning cooperatively" (Raider). [emphasis mine]

### What does Socratic mean?

Socratic comes from the name Socrates (ca. 470-399 BC) who was a classical Greek philosopher; he developed a Theory of Knowledge.

### What is a Socratic Seminar?

A Socratic Seminar is a method to try to understand information by creating an in-class dialogue based on a specific text. The participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas through rigorously thoughtful dialogue, rather than by memorizing bits of information or meeting arbitrary demands for 'coverage.'

### What Do I Do?

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; 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 participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.
- 4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.**
5. Talk to the participants, not just the leader.
6. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
7. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
8. Listen carefully and respectfully.
9. Speak up so that everyone can hear you.
10. Talk to each other, not just to the teacher or the leader.
11. Discuss the ideas rather than each other's opinions.
12. You are responsible for the seminar.

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## Socratic Seminar for *The Great Gatsby*

### How Do I Prepare?

While reading the homework assignments, use Post It notes or jot down important quotes or ideas that you believe will support your argument. Remember that you WILL have your book and notes accessible for this activity! USE your resources!

\*\*\*FIRST Establish: What do you think Fitzgerald believes about the American dream? How does the novel communicate that to you? Why do you think he feels this way? (Support with details from text.)

\*\*Next: Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

\*Finally: Following this theme, consider the age of the novel (written in 1925). Have times changed significantly? Is his view of materialism and the American Dream still accurate today?

## Stem Questions that Facilitate & Sustain Dialogue

### Agree / Disagree

Has anyone else had a similar . . . ?

Who has a different . . . ?

### Clarification

I'm not sure I understand . . . ?

Tell me more about . . . ?

Do you see gaps in my reasoning?

Are you taking into account something different from what I have considered?

### Support Questions

Can you give us an example of . . . ?

Where in the story . . . ?

What would be a good reason for . . . ?

What is some evidence for . . . ?

### Cause and Effect

Why do you think that happened?

How could that have been prevented?

Do you think that would happen that way again? Why?

What are some reasons people . . . ?

### Different Situation

Can you describe a situation that would . . . ?

Suppose \_\_\_\_\_. Would that still be true?  
Why or why not?

### Counterexample

Would that still happen if . . . ?

What might have made the difference?

### Compare / Contrast

How are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ alike? Different?

What is that similar to?

Can you think of why this feels different than . . . ?

How does this (poem, book, incident, etc.) remind you of . . . ?

### Benefits / Burdens

What are some of the reasons this wouldn't (would) be a good idea?

Would anyone like to speak to the opposite side?

Those are some reasons this would work; what reasons might it not work?

### Structure / Function

If that was the goal, what do you think about . . . (the action, reaction)?

What were her/his choices of how to . . . ?

Why was she/he doing that? (Reply gives reason)  
What do you think of that approach?

What better choices could he/she have made?

What rules would we need to make sure . . . ?

### Personal Experience

What would you do in that situation?

Has anything like that ever happened to you?