



SOCRATIC SEMINAR: FISHBOWL FORMAT
The Brethren and The Nine
AP Gov/Ms. Strong



“All I know is that I know nothing” --- Socrates

Purpose of the Socratic Seminar:

Students will process and discuss the two articles using the Socratic method --- an in depth question and answer session in which students learn from each other.

Process:

- Students will read the two articles carefully at home and prepare a document analysis for each. Students must be thoroughly familiar with both documents.
- Class will be divided in half on seminar day, one group per article.
- Half the class will participate in the seminar in the “fish bowl,” while the other half silently observes and evaluates seminar participants. Each student on the outside will be assigned one participant on the inside and is expected to critic that student’s participation. In the second half, the students will switch roles.
- Ms. Strong will submit questions for discussion by seminar participants. These questions will require knowledge of the content of the document as well as a general understanding of the topic.
- Students will listen to each other and comment on each other’s remarks, examining the many angles which the question can be answered.
- **This is not a debate, nor is it a competition.** Students are working TOGETHER to discuss the meaning of the document. During the discussion, students must assume that no one student is right or wrong, each has ideas that are valuable.
- Students will be graded based on the relevant comments and original ideas presented during the discussion as established in the rubric below.

Scoring Rubric:

- **2 Points:** Participant contributes a relevant and insightful comment supported by specific evidence, quotes, and/or supporting facts taken directly from the reading.
- **1 Point:** Participant makes a relevant, general comment, but not supported by specific evidence or quotes from the reading.
- **½ Point:** Participant demonstrates leadership by helping to keep the group focused and on task, asking pertinent questions, clarifying ideas from other participants, and/or soliciting comments from those in the group who have not spoken much.
- **0 Points:** Did not participate in the Socratic Seminar
- **-1 Point:** Participant makes an irrelevant, sarcastic, or disrespectful comment that subverts the academic purpose of the seminar and violates the culture of mutual respect

Socratic Seminar #1 - Excerpt from *The Brethren*, Bob Woodward & Scott Armstrong

1. Very briefly discuss how and why each of the Justices was planning to vote on *Roe v. Wade*
 - Blackmun (author)
 - Douglas
 - Powell
 - Stewart
 - Brennan
 - Marshall
 - White
 - Rehnquist
 - Burger
2. What role did the clerks play in assisting the justices?
3. Why is this decision considered activist? Why did the decision take so long to be released?
4. The public generally believes that justices of the Supreme Court are insulated from politics. Based upon this excerpt, what conclusions can you draw about the politics within the Court?

Socratic Seminar #2 - Excerpt from *The Nine*, Jeffrey Toobin

1. Very briefly discuss how and why each of the Justices voted in *Bush v. Gore*
 - Breyer
 - O'Connor
 - Souter
 - Rehnquist
 - Thomas
 - Kennedy
 - Ginsburg
 - Scalia
 - Stevens
2. Discuss the role of politics on the Court as the justices attempted to influence the votes of their colleagues. Use specific examples.
3. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Steven's wrote:

It is confidence in the men and women who administer the judicial system that is the true backbone of the rule of law. Time will one day heal the wound to that confidence that will be inflicted by today's decision. One thing, however is certain. Although we many never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year's Presidential election, the identity of the loser is pellucidly clear. It is the Nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law.

 - Interpret the quote (what is Steven's saying?).
 - What does the quote tell us about the impact of the decision on the legitimacy of the Supreme Court in the eyes of the public after the *Bush v. Gore* decision?
4. The public generally believes that justices of the Supreme Court are insulated from politics. Based upon this excerpt, what conclusions can you draw about the politics within the Court?