



SOCRATIC SEMINAR: FISHBOWL FORMAT
***Federalist #10* by James Madison**
***For Big Givers, Cash and Clout Arrive Together* by Nicholas Confessore**



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

Purpose of the Socratic Seminar:

Students will process and discuss Madison’s *Federalist 10* and Weisberg’s *Interest-Group Conservatism* 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: THE GOLDFISH

Socratic Seminar #1 - *Federalist #10* by James Madison

1. Establish the ground rules and group norms of the fishbowl discussion. [How will everyone be heard? Example: no one speaks twice until everyone speaks once.]
2. First discuss Madison's thesis and ideological bias in *Federalist #10* (*Federalist Papers*).
3. How does Madison define a "faction?" How are factions in Madison's day similar to or even the same as modern special interest groups?
4. What problems do factions present to government and politics, both in the 18th Century and today?
5. Madison argues that "the *causes* of faction cannot be removed; and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its *effects*." Interpret the quote and explain why Madison believes that pure democracy is not the answer.
6. Why does Madison believe a large republic as created by the Constitution is the best tool to limit the effects of factions? Is Madison right? Defend your answer.
7. What do you think Madison would say about the modern American special interest groups and the state of politics today?

SOCRATIC SEMINAR #2: THE GUPPIES

Socratic Seminar #2 - *For Big Givers, Cash and Clout Arrive Together* by Nicholas Confessore

1. Establish the ground rules and group norms of the fishbowl discussion. [How will everyone be heard? Example: no one speaks twice until everyone speaks once.]
2. First discuss the authors' thesis and ideological bias in writing the article.
3. Identify some of the interest groups and Political Action Committees (referred to as Super PACs) mentioned in the article. How do these groups operate during political campaigns?
4. In the article, Confessore talks about "the money-access-power matrix." Explain what the matrix is and how it relates to campaigns and public policy.
5. How do these special interest groups represent (or not represent) the interests of the country as a whole?
6. Do you think the influence of these interest groups during the 2012 Presidential election is a good thing or a bad thing for American citizens? Defend your answer.
7. What do you think Madison would say about the modern American special interest groups discussed in this article?