

Mapping the seminar: Another way to process the seminar dynamic is to assign a student prior to beginning to map the seminar. This student uses either a large sheet of paper that can be displayed on the wall or a regular sheet of paper that can be displayed on a document camera to keep track of the flow of the dialogue in the seminar. The student draws a large circle and an X or little boxes to indicate each student in the speaking circle. As the dialogue starts, the student draws a line from the first speaker (who asks the opening question) to the second speaker, the third, and so on. S/he continues to draw the lines through the whole seminar. At the end, the class analyzes the map and makes observations. They determine patterns: who has the most lines (did they dominate the conversation?); who has the least lines; are there many lines back and forth between two people; etc. Based on the map, students can set goals for the next seminar.

Mapping the dialogue: Another option, in addition to mapping the flow of the conversation, is to assign students in an outside circle to keep track of what is actually said. One outer student can be responsible for scripting the dialogue of one or two inner students. This allows the class to analyze the quality of the dialogue.

8. Use students' enhanced understanding of the text to move to the next step of the unit/lesson, building on and connecting the ideas from the seminar to the other activities in the unit/lesson. Socratic Seminar is an especially rich pre-writing experience that prepares students to articulate a more thorough understanding of a topic than they might otherwise have achieved.

VARIATION:

Triad: Arrange students so that each individual student in the inner circle (called a "pilot") has two "co-pilots" that sit behind and on either side of him/her. The pilot and co-pilots form the triad. Pilots are in the inner circle and speak; co-pilots are in the outer circle and only speak during consult times. The seminar proceeds as normal, writing and sharing questions, discussion, etc. At a certain point during the discussion, the leader pauses the conversation and directs the triads to talk to each other. Sometimes they talk about something that is being discussed in the circle and needs more depth. Sometimes the triads talk about a question posed by the leader. Sometimes the leader asks the triads to come up with a new question or direction for the seminar—it just depends on how things are progressing in the seminar. Anytime the triads are speaking, they can move seats and one of the co-pilots can move into the pilot seat. But only during that time is switching seats allowed.

This variation is helpful because it gives students who may not yet have the courage to speak in a large group the chance to practice in a triad. It also involves the whole class, as opposed to the inner/outer circle which may not include all students speaking in one seminar sitting.