

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Socratic Seminar
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Social Studies Methods
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Instructional Model

Socratic Seminar – Students will participate in a structured discussion about the themes, values, and ideas that can be drawn from the text, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Grade Level

9-12th grades (Possible adaptation could be made to accommodate younger students)

Overview

In this Socratic Seminar, students will examine *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in an analytical manner. Students will identify, extract, and discuss the central themes and ideas of this important document. After reading and contemplating the text, the students will bring to class a short write-up (or “ticket”) on the “5 most important human rights in the *Declaration*”. The discussion that will follow will allow students to cooperatively discuss the basis of the document and the value it places on human life and freedom. Furthermore, the students will also have the opportunity to engage in discussion about what (if any) impact this document has had on modern history along with the strengths and weaknesses of the document.

Courses

This lesson could be used in a number of courses, including: American Government, United States History, World History/Western Civilization, and Sociology.

Time

This lesson will cover two 50-minute class periods. One period will be used to introduce the topic, hand out the reading, and explain how the ticket assignment will be done (along with class time to work on the reading). The second class period will be used for the discussion and the debrief.

Rationale

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration was a direct response to atrocities committed by Nazi Germany during World War II, specifically the Holocaust. The document was designed to outline and describe the basic human rights to which all human beings (regardless of race, sex, region, or any other descriptor) are entitled. Although the document is not legally binding in an official capacity, it is often cited as being a component of (or at least an emanation of) international law. The document has been received with widespread praise and scattered criticism. The idea of human rights and what they constitute is an important subject to study, both historically and contemporarily. It is an issue that has direct relevance to many modern events, including (but not limited to) the war in Iraq and the situation in Darfur. This lesson will promote higher-order thinking and critical analysis while giving the students the opportunity to discuss a document and an issue that has many interpretations, involves many debates, and poses many questions.

Objectives

Throughout this Socratic Seminar, student will:

Academic

1. Explain different points of view on the subject of human rights (B.12.1)
2. Analyze a primary source related to a historical question to evaluate its relevance, make comparisons to modern events, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion (B.12.2)
3. Recall, select, and analyze significant historical periods and the relationships among them (B.12.3)
4. Analyze a document that has influenced the legal and political heritage of the United States (B.12.6)
5. Select an instance of intellectual change in the world and discuss the impact this change has had on beliefs and values (B.12.10)
6. Describe the purpose and effects of treaties, alliances, and international organizations that characterize today's interconnected world (B.12.16)
7. Identify the sources, evaluate the justification, and analyze the implications of certain rights and responsibilities of citizens (C.12.1)
8. Describe how different political systems define and protect individual human rights (C.12.2)
9. Explain the relationship of the United States to other nations and its role in international organizations, such as the United Nations (C.12.12)
10. Describe and analyze the origins and consequences of slavery, genocide, and other forms of persecution including the Holocaust (C.12.15)
11. Describe the evolution of movements to assert rights by people with disabilities, ethnic and racial groups, and women (C.12.16)
12. Explain the current and past efforts of groups and institutions to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups such as women, children, the elderly, and individuals who are disabled (E.12.12)

Intellectual

1. Identify and analyze the key concepts and themes of the text.
2. Engage in a thoughtful and analytical discussion of the text.

Social

1. Develop/utilize skills of active listening and discussion.
2. Effectively communicate ideas and build on the ideas of others.

Materials

Chalkboard or dry-erase board

Chalk or dry-erase marker

Copies of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Copies of the writing assignment and the grading rubric

Procedure

1. Introduction
 - Introduce the idea of a Socratic Seminar and what it entails.
 - Distribute copies of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to students.

- Instruct students to read the document for a discussion that will take place during the next class period. Emphasize that the document should be read closely and analytically.
- Assign “ticket”
 - Explain to students that, individually, they are to write down what they believe are the 5 most important rights outlined in the reading.
 - Remind students that they must each bring this “ticket” to participate in the discussion.
 - Emphasize that those who do not have a “ticket” will not be allowed to participate and will be assigned to another task for the duration of the discussion.

2. Discussion

- Before class begins, organize the desks/tables into a circle. By sitting in this manner, students will all be able to see each other and communication will be easier.
- Also, before class begins, have the “rules” and the “goals” written on the board.
 - Rules
 - “Don’t raise your hand to be called on; feel free to speak up.”
 - “Only 1 person may speak at a time.”
 - “Be sure to refer to the text.”
 - “Make the effort to build on the ideas of others.”
 - Goals
 - “Gain a deeper understanding of the text.”
 - “Listen closely and build on the ideas of others.”
- As students enter the room, check their “tickets”.
 - Students with a ticket should sit in the circle.
 - Student without a ticket should sit outside of the circle.
- Ask students with a ticket to create “name tents” on a sheet of paper and place them on their desk/table. As they are doing this, explain to students who do not have their ticket that they will keep track of who speaks, how often, how long a particular conversation thread goes on, and how often students reference the text.
- Direct the students’ attention to the rules and goals on the board. Ask if there are any questions.
- Take a seat in the circle and state the focus question: **What are human rights?**
- Allow students to have a minute or two to reference their text, take some notes, and organize their thoughts with relation to the focus question.
- After 1-2 minutes has elapsed, encourage students to begin the discussion.
- Allow the discussion to progress from the students. Do not attempt to steer it – the teacher should be an observer, taking notes about the comments being made and who is making them. However, be ready to make comments if need be:
 - Redirecting the conversation if the discussion is becoming unfocused or too far astray.
 - Take the opportunity to clarify some concepts or terms that may be presenting the students with problems.
 - Ask clarifying questions:
 - “Where did you find that in the text?”

- “How does that relate to what x said before?”
 - “How do you know that?” or “How did you come to that conclusion?”
 - Have a set of extra questions on hand to foster deeper thought from the students or to redirect the discussion if need be:
 - “How do you think these ideas have been enforced since the declaration?”
 - “How do you think these ideas have been abused since the declaration?”
 - “What more do you think countries could do to protect human rights?”
 - “What is the importance of this document?”
 - “What are the strengths and weaknesses of this document?”
 - “Why do you believe the document was created?”
 - “What groups or countries do you think may object to the wording of the document. Why?”
 - “How do you think this document compares/contrasts with what you know of other documents, such as the United States Constitution?”
 - “How do you believe an issue such as torture would relate to this document?”
 - “How well do you believe the United States has upheld/does uphold the values of this document?”
 - “What examples, past or present, can you give where human rights have been violated?”
 - “Do you believe the ideas of this document favor democratic governments or non-democratic governments? Why?”
 - “How does the article pertaining to marriage relate to human rights? How is this relevant in the modern day?”
 - “What do you think of the article pertaining to a ‘standard of living’ and ‘necessary social service’? How is this relevant to our society?”
 - “What do you think of the clause concerning education?” Do you agree with the idea of ‘compulsory education’? Why or why not?”
 - “Do you believe the real world expectations of these rights is realistic or implausible? Why?”
 - If the discussion is progressing very well and there are still many aspects not yet addressed, the discussion may continue into a third class period. This should be gauged by the level of participation from the students and the quality of the discussion. 20-30 minutes should suffice, but the discussion should not be arbitrarily timed. Do not cut off a good discussion, but do not prolong a poor one.
 - Before ending the discussion, ask if any students have any final thoughts. Congratulate the students on the discussion and move into the debrief.
3. Debrief
- Explain to the students that the debrief entails a short conversation analyzing the discussion and reaching a consensus as to whether the goals of the lesson were achieved.
 - Ask the students what they believe worked in the seminar and what did not. What did they learn from this process and discussion? Did they gain a deeper

- understanding of the text and its issues?
- Ask those who did not have tickets to discuss their records with the class; be sure to ask these students if they gained new insight from outside of the discussion.
 - Ask the students if there was some aspect of the lesson or the discussion they would like to be changed for the future. Is this an activity they would like to do again?
 - Collect the records from the students who did not have a ticket.
4. Assessment
- There will be two assessments for this lesson. The first is an assessment based on participation. From the notes taken during the discussion and the debrief, along with the records made by those who did not participate, *informally* “grade” the students on how well they performed during this lesson.
 - The second assessment is a writing assignment. After the debrief has finished, distribute copies of the assignment and copies of the grading rubric to the students. The assignment involves a paper 1-2 pages in length answering the following question: “What do you believe are the values and restrictions of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*?” Let the class know that the paper will be collected during the next class period.

Lesson Plan Evaluation/Reflection

This lesson plan presents students with an opportunity to analytically critique the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This document was created in wake of atrocities committed during World War II, specifically the Holocaust. Unfortunately, genocides and ethnic cleansing persist in the modern world. Furthermore, the abuse of basic human rights is a pervasive element of many countries and regions. These events, both past and present, represent a repulsive component to modern human history. As such, it is necessary to understand the foundations and basic tenets of this document, which is very likely the first comprehensive attempt to protect human rights on a global scale. As important as events surrounding human rights have been in the past, along with the salience of the issue in the modern world, the study of such a document is an opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of the global initiative to protect human rights, while examining the ideas, language, and values that this document sets forth.

Higher Order Thinking: 4

The PASS standards designate higher order thinking as instruction that involves students in “manipulating information and ideas by synthesizing, generalizing, explaining, hypothesizing, or arriving at conclusions...” (PASS). The nature of the Socratic Seminar, its focus on discussion of a myriad of issues both inherent in the text and those not explicitly stated, lends itself well to this standard. I believe this lesson plan would score a 4 on this standard. During the discussion portion of the lesson, students will be engaged in an activity that promotes higher order thinking (a synthesis of material from the text to outside material along with contemplation of the issues and themes of the text). The discussion comprises the bulk of the time for the lesson and I would suspect that the majority of the class would actively take part.

Deep Knowledge: 4

The PASS standards state that deep knowledge occurs when students explore a “topic with enough thoroughness to explore connections and relationships” (PASS). I believe this lesson would score a 4 on this standard. The focus question to begin the discussion is “What are human rights?” The discussion will involve little to no factual information concerning names or dates with regards to the creation of the document. Rather, the discussion is designed to invoke student thought about the issues and ideas of the document and how they believe these themes are embraced or ignored in the modern world. Students will focus on issues of human rights, how they are defined, what they entail, and how their preservation represents a difficult, complicated task.

Substantive Conversation: 4

The PASS standards define substantive conversation as “extended conversational exchanges with the teacher and/or peers about subject matter... that builds an improved and shared understanding of ideas and topics” (PASS). I believe this lesson would score a 4 on this standard. There are 3 components of substantive conversation: dialogue involving higher order thinking, a conversation based on the sharing of ideas, and a dialogue where students build on each other’s comments to reach a greater understanding. All three of these components are present in this Socratic Seminar. In fact, Socratic Seminars (along with Structured Academic Controversies) may be the ideal lesson plan to address this standard. I grade this plan a 4 based on one aspect. The only difference between a 4 and a 5 is the level of participation from students. A 5 occurs when “almost all” students take part, whereas a 4 occurs when “many” take part. I would hope that every student would bring their ticket and actively participate but I realize that this view is idealistic and some students will not have a ticket or will minimally participate.

Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom: 4

The PASS standards states that students should “make connections between substantive knowledge and personal experience, social problems, or public policy” (PASS). I believe this lesson would score a 4 on this standard. The issue of human rights is an important topic that has relevance, both internationally and domestically. Through this lesson, students will gain a deeper understanding of what human rights are and how they are addressed. Through the conversation, students will have the opportunity to discuss how human rights are protected or abused in the global community. Furthermore, the written assignment portion of the lesson gives students the opportunity to outline their views concerning the values and beliefs of the document in question. Through this assignment, students will have the opportunity to reflect on what they perceive to be the value of such a document as well as its shortcomings or limitations.

Ethical Valuing: 5

The PASS standards defines ethical valuing as the consideration of “core democratic values when making decision on matters of public concern or when judging personal conduct” (PASS). I believe this lesson would score a 5 on this standard. The Socratic Seminar model is based upon the idea of conversation to achieve a deeper understanding

of particular themes and issues. In this case, the themes and issues relate to the idea of human rights, a concept heavily based in ethics and values. While students may not agree with every article in the *Declaration* that is discussed, they will have the ability to understand its importance. One goal of this lesson is for students to examine these issues from a non-relativistic point of view. Furthermore, as one of the goals of social studies instruction is to promote good citizenship, the idea of individual rights and freedoms is the bedrock of American society. As such, the study of this topic will promote good citizenship within American culture, while challenging students to examine the role of human rights in the larger global community.

Integration: 5

The PASS standards advocate instruction that “broadens the scope of learning by spanning social studies disciplines, linking social studies to other subject areas, bridging time or place, and blending knowledge with skills” (PASS). I believe this lesson would score a 5 on this standard. This Socratic Seminar features all four types of integration outlined by the PASS standards: interdisciplinary, subject area, time and place, and knowledge and skills. This lesson plan could be used in many social studies disciplines including history (world and U.S.), political science, and sociology. The discussion, along with the “re-focus” questions the teacher can use, will correlate the drafting of this document with other world events, both historical and political. The students will have the opportunity to connect these ideas to the modern world and also to other cultures and societies. Finally, the discussion is designed to give students a deeper understanding of the material while fostering other skills, such as critical analysis, active listening, and thoughtful discussion.

Possible Changes

This lesson could be used in many different classes at almost any level of high school. The plan is adaptable for younger students and would only require some modest changes to the wording of the text (or, potentially, a handout to accompany the reading that defines key terms and concepts). The language used in the *Declaration* is the only impediment to using this lesson plan with younger students.

Transcendent Teaching and Issues

There are many things I have learned throughout the creation of this lesson plan. One of the most important things is the realization of the time and effort needed to design a quality lesson plan. Lesson plans that are thrown together hastily will likely achieve few of the desired goals for students. Preparation is key to effective instruction. I feel that Socratic Seminars are valuable tools to use. The environment that is created is positive, active, and conducive to student learning. Furthermore, this model facilitates student learning by focusing the attention on them and their construction of knowledge. Throughout the discussion, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of concepts but they will not do so because of lecture or some other teacher-centered model. They will be learning cooperatively, constructing knowledge from each other. In conclusion, I believe the core of the lesson plan is the document being examined. Socratic Seminars are only as valuable as the text which is being read and discussed. I feel lucky to have found a topic and document that I believe is well worth critical

examination and discussion, especially in the modern day. With proper implementation, I believe this can be a very effective lesson plan that promotes student learning and student contemplation of important subject matter.

Socratic Seminar Ticket

In the space given below, write down what you believe are the 5 most important rights that are given or outlined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. If you do not bring this completed sheet to class tomorrow, you will not be allowed to participate in the discussion and will be assigned another task.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Socratic Seminar Response Rubric

Name _____

Category	4	3	2	1	Score
Evidence	Includes 6 or more facts from the document that support your position	Includes 4-5 facts from the document that support your position	Includes 2-3 facts from the document that support your position	Includes 0-1 facts from the document that support your position	
Explanations Of Facts	All facts are thoroughly explained with details from personal experiences and history	Most facts are well explained with details from personal experiences and history	Some facts are explained; more details from personal experiences and history could be provided	Few or no facts are explained or described	
Organization	Very well organized; easy to follow	Well organized; fairly easy to follow	Organized; difficult to follow in some areas	Confusing; hard to follow	
Spelling and Grammar	No errors in spelling or grammar	Few errors in spelling or grammar	Some errors in spelling or grammar	Many errors in spelling or grammar	

TOTAL SCORE:

_____ /16 Points

Comments:

Socratic Seminar Writing Assignment

Write a 1-2 page paper answering the following question: What do you believe are the values and restrictions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Why? Be sure to use facts from the text to support your argument. Include any personal experiences that are relevant along with historical examples. Refer to the grading rubric for expectations.