

# Socratic Seminar: Too Close to the Sun

## Social Learning/Constructivism Model Socratic Seminar, Chapter 10, pp. 190–203 6 Grade, Language Arts/Social Studies

### 1. MATERIALS/PREPLANNING

- **Materials**
  - Copies of text (1 per student)
  - Computer with Internet access & projector
  - Journals
- **Vocabulary**
  - Labyrinth
- **Literature**
  - *Daedalus and Icarus* (<http://myths.e2bn.org/mythsandlegends/textonly1598-daedalus-and-icarus.html>)

### 2. OBJECTIVE

- **Objectives**
  - **Students Will Understand**
    - Responsibility for an outcome is sometimes shared by multiple people
    - Risks cannot always be judged by their outcomes
  - **Students Will Know**
    - Controversial topics can be viewed or resolved in more than one way
    - Effective discussion can help people share these views and reach resolutions
  - **Students Will Be Able To**
    - Present and justify a supported point of view on a controversial topic
    - Discuss the nature of responsibility and risk-taking
- **State the Cognitive Taxonomy and/(Affective/ Psychomotor) Level**
  - **Cognitive**
    - Knowledge
    - Comprehension
    - Application
    - Analysis
    - Synthesis
    - Evaluation
  - **Affective**
    - Receiving
    - Responding
    - Valuing
- **Standards**
  - **Reading–Language Arts Framework (2007)**
    - 3.0 *Literary Response and Analysis*
      - 3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character (e.g., courage or cowardice, ambition or laziness) on the plot and the resolution of the conflict.
      - 3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.
  - **History–Social Science Framework (2009)**
    - 6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the

early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

- 4. Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and from *Aesop's Fables*.

### 3. ASSESSMENT

- **Self-evaluation (formal):** After the discussion has been conducted, students will evaluate their own participation in the discussion using the following rubric. They will check the appropriate box for each question, and then add up the total number of points at the bottom.
  - Adapted from Estes, Mintz, & Gunter (2011, p. 200)

Score	1 – Never	2 – Sometimes	3 – Always
Did I speak clearly so everyone could hear?			
Did I cite reasons and evidence for each of my comments?			
Did I use the text as a source of my evidence?			
Did I listen to others respectfully?			
Did I impede the flow of the conversation?			
Did I speak with other participants besides the leader?			
Was I supportive of my classmates?			
Did I ask for help or clarification if/when I was confused?			
Did I speak politely and respectfully when a disagreement arose?			
Was I prepared for the seminar?			
Comments:			Total: ____/30

- **Progress monitoring (formal):** Because the teacher's role is that of facilitator and guide, they are able to observe student participation more fully, and therefore to conduct an accurate evaluation of each student's progress. The following rubric will be used to assess participation and preparation:
  - Adapted from Estes, Mintz, & Gunter (2011, p. 202)

Score	1	2	3
<b>Concentration</b>	Student is easily distracted, distracts others, or does not follow instructions	Student demonstrates on-task behavior, but does not appear to be actively listening	Student is fully engaged in discussion and listens attentively
<b>Contribution</b>	Student's responses are irrelevant to the discussion, or are not textually based	Student's responses are pertinent to the discussion and acknowledge the ideas of others	Student's responses clarify and extend previously shared ideas, and generate new ideas
<b>Preparation</b>	Student's text is sparsely annotated or not annotated, and student lacks basic understanding of the text	Student's annotations highlight important points and allow student to add value to the discussion	Student's annotations reveal careful reading, critical thinking, and a thorough understanding of the text

- These assessments have been chosen because of their strong conduciveness to metacognition and reflective thinking. They contribute to the building of critical thinking skills and collaborative skills.

#### 4. LESSON OPENING/PURPOSE

- **Clearly state to students how this lesson will benefit students.**

**My version:** The Socratic seminar is an ideal choice for this lesson because it involves a text with several clear themes and a controversial ending. Students will be able to discuss these themes in detail, and will benefit from hearing the thought processes of their classmates. They will encounter a meaningful text and have the opportunity to explore it through a variety of formats.

**Student version:** Today and tomorrow we are going to be reading and discussing the Greek myth, *Daedalus and Icarus*. You may have heard the expression, “Flying too close to the sun”; that phrase comes from this story. We will further explore this father-son adventure by holding a Socratic seminar, a whole-class activity in which you will discuss a controversial question that has many answers. This will be an opportunity to share your ideas, listen to others’ ideas, and form your own opinion. By the end, you will be better communicators and have a deeper understanding of this story and Greek mythology.

#### 5. MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING

- Students will be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated by the forms of assessment used in this lesson. They will be aware of their participation grade, which is determined by the teacher, but they will enjoy a measure of control in honestly evaluating their own efforts. This will help to sustain intrinsic motivation throughout the activity.
- Students will also find enjoyment in the animated, dramatized reading of the text, which will contribute to their intrinsic motivation. When the content is enjoyable, students do not need to work as hard to find a reason to remain interested. Also, because the themes of the story (e.g., parent-child relationships, confronting danger, coping with consequences, etc.) are easily applicable to their own lives, they will find more reasons to stay engaged and to find value in the lesson.

#### 6. LESSON BODY

##### Step 1 Review/Make Connections to Previously Learned Material

Present Advance Organizer on Greek mythology.

##### Step 2 State Objectives for the Lesson

By the end of this lesson, we will understand more about responsibility and risk-taking, and will be able to discuss each thoughtfully. We will also know that difficult questions have difficult answers, but we can achieve resolutions by discussing our options with other people and sharing all our ideas. Finally, we will be able to choose a side of an argument – and there may be many sides to choose from – based on what we have read. This argument will focus on risk and responsibility, two things you are learning more about as you become more independent.

##### Step 3 Present New Material

###### 1. Choose the text—written, visual or audio.

- The text chosen for this lesson is the story of *Daedalus and Icarus* from Greek mythology. There are several adaptations of this story, but the one selected for this age group comes from East of England Broadband Network’s (E2BN) “Myths and Legends” page. It includes an animated, text-and-image version that has been voiced over, and a text-only version. Students will experience the story in both ways, as they will watch and listen to it on Day 1, and read and annotate the text for homework before Day 2 (when the discussion will take place).

###### 2. Plan and cluster several questions of varying cognitive demand.

- Basic question: Was Daedalus ultimately responsible for his son’s tragic death?
- Follow-up questions:
  1. Why were Daedalus and Icarus trapped on Crete?
  2. What decisions led to their imprisonment?
  3. What dangers did they face by choosing to stay on the island?
  4. Were there any characters or details that were irrelevant to the themes of the story?
  5. Have you ever been given advice that was too difficult to follow?

- 6. Was the possible reward of their freedom worth the risk of flying across the sea?
- 7. How might this story have affected the daily lives of the Ancient Greeks?
- 8. Can you imagine what Daedalus and Icarus would have done next if they landed safely on Sicily?
- 9. (Repeat basic question)

### 3. Introduce the model to the students.

- On Day 1, students will be given the participation rubric, which describes the expected norms for a Socratic seminar. They will also be given a list of characteristics that define an excellent seminar member (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011, p. 198).
  - “An excellent seminar member demonstrates respect for the learning of all participants by:
    - 1) Showing patience with a variety of ideas and contributions
    - 2) Asking for clarification
    - 3) Moving the conversation forward
    - 4) Addressing comments to all or most of the other participants, and
    - 5) Not speaking too much”
- On Day 2, teacher will review the norms with students prior to the discussion, clarifying any questions or misconceptions.

### 4. Conduct the discussion.

- The discussion will be facilitated and guided by the teacher, but the students will do the discussing. Teacher will use the follow-up questions from step 2 to open students up to a wide variety of information so they can choose a well-informed personal perspective (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011). Remember to ask students to justify their responses using the text when necessary.

### 5. Review and summarize the discussion.

- Teacher will lead students in debriefing the discussion, restating the discovered ideas and making generalizations about the themes.
- Sample themes include:
  - Children should trust their parents even when it’s difficult.
  - Sometimes things that look good or fun can be dangerous.
  - Our feelings do not make good leaders.
  - Don’t always judge a risk by its outcome.
  - Independence is a double-edged sword.

### 6. Evaluate the discussion with students based on previously stated criteria.

- Students will use the self-evaluation rubric to assess their participation in the seminar. In addition to the self-evaluation, students will be evaluated by the teacher using the participation/preparation rubric. This reflective period will conclude Day 2.

## Step 4

### Guide Practice, Assess Performance, and Provide Corrective Feedback

**Questioning** – Because the students have already answered several questions of varying cognitive demand, it would be more beneficial for them to practice asking questions. For guided practice, students will spend several minutes **creating** 3 higher-level questions based on the text; these questions should extend beyond the limits of the text and focus on **application**, **synthesis**, and **evaluation**. The questions should also be conducive to open-ended discussion rather than single answers. Students will then arrange themselves into groups of 3 or 4 and will choose one of their questions to pose to the group. At the end of the small group discussion, teacher will collect students’ questions for evaluation and for giving feedback. This type of practice is appropriate because the Socratic seminar process emphasizes the acquisition and development of critical thinking skills (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011).

**Correcting Errors** – This exercise is an opportunity to help students understand how to ask an open-ended question that is demands more advanced cognitive activity. Students can be guided toward questions that have multiple answers, generate new ideas, and deepen understanding.

**Step 5 Assign Independent Practices, Assess Performance, and Provide Corrective Feedback**  
Students will **compose** a journal entry in which they reflect upon their Socratic seminar experience. They may choose to reflect on what it was like to participate in the discussion, whether or not they felt validated for their viewpoints, or what they liked or disliked about the experience. Because the goal is for students to practice “thoughtful engagement,” they should also practice thoughtful reflection (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011, p. 204).

**Step 6 Review Periodically – Build in review of lesson in future lessons**  
Obviously, this Socratic seminar will be an ideal reference point when future seminars are conducted in this manner. Students will already be familiar with the format, but the teacher can address any issues or things that did not go so well the first time around. Furthermore, students can reflect briefly on their first experience before embarking on their second.

## 7. Student Work Examples/Technology Support

- **Attach samples of student work.**
  - Samples of students-generated discussion questions are included at the end of the lesson.
- **Add technology support**
  - Animated, voiced-over version: <http://myths.e2bn.org/mythsandlegends/story1598-daedalus-and-icarus.html>
  - Text-only version: <http://myths.e2bn.org/mythsandlegends/textonly1598-daedalus-and-icarus.html>
  - Song to support lesson: “Daedalus” by Thrice (2008)
    - Available on Spotify, iTunes, and YouTube

## Student Work Samples – Socratic Seminar Guided Practice

### **Student 1:**

- 1) Describe a time when you took a risk that did not work out the way you had hoped.
- 2) How would you feel if you were Daedalus as Icarus was flying higher and higher?
- 3) Can you come up with better advice for Daedalus to give Icarus when they’re about to fly?

### **Student 2:**

- 1) What does it feel like when your parents tell you what to do?
- 2) Did Daedalus give Icarus good advice even though he died?
- 3) What other ways could Daedalus and Icarus have escaped the island?

### **Student 3:**

- 1) What makes it hard to obey parents sometimes?
- 2) Was Daedalus a good father for making his son fly?
- 3) Did you ever feel like Icarus because you thought something bad was good for you?