

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Facilitating a Socratic Seminar Video Transcript

Student:

In my opinion, I don't think the Haitian revolution was successful.

Student:

Even though they gained their independence, they still had to pay back the \$150 million debt for France.

Student:

There's different like aspects of why they keep going further and further in debt, and there's reasons why their country or whatever doesn't work. So I feel like that's a good point.

Kristin Ferrales:

So what I'm going to ask that everybody does for the next maybe two minutes is think about the text that we read.

Today's lesson was a Socratic seminar. Students have been studying the French and Haitian revolutions for the last four or five weeks.

I want you to answer the two questions at the top of your handout. What big ideas stood out to you in this text?

There's a lot of preparation that goes into running a seminar that is student-run. I think the biggest thing to really think about is understanding what's the outcome that you want of the discussion and what are the steps that you're putting into place to get students there.

The second question I want you to jot down your thoughts about is what questions were raised for you or in what ways did this article challenge your thinking? Those two things are just going to get your brain working before we have our big discussion in about five minutes.

Today we used a lot of writing in the classroom. One of the most important things I've learned in my years as a teacher is that when I've asked students to discuss things that they haven't really thought about and they haven't put to

paper, their answers tend to be worse. They tend to be less thought out, they tend to be less based in the text. And so I always try to start discussions and end discussions with students both brainstorming on paper and then reflecting about what they heard, what they liked, what they thought, how their ideas changed.

Terrell:

She'll ask us questions based on this so we are actually grasping what we learned, and she's making sure that we know what's going on. So when we have the discussion, we can be prepared and we know what we're talking about rather than just throwing out all kinds of crazy ideas.

Ferrales:

So we'll take maybe another minute or so. After they've had a couple minutes to just think then we go over some of the key parts of the protocol. Today we focused on precision in their language. I want you to be really precise with the language that you're using. And what I mean by precise is if you disagree with an idea that somebody says, please don't say, "I disagree with Terrel." Say, "I disagree with the point Terrel made about Haiti being angry about not having to pay back France."

I've been really pushing students to think about taking the person out of their conversation and really placing the ideas at the forefront.

So if I can ask you to flip over your paper. On the back side, there are guiding questions for today's discussion. Would anybody like to start us off?

Student:

It said that they both fought for their independence and both places had chiefs and had conducted a constitution, but Haiti suffered a lot and it became unstable because of the indemnities that they had to pay in response to the revolution.

Student:

So when they accepted that \$150 million debt to pay, it took them 80 years to actually pay it off. They didn't pay it off till 1922.

Student:

Slavery was boosting France's economy. Do you think that like France would have stopped bothering them and stopped burdening them with money and stuff like that?

Student:

So I think Haiti was already poor, and like to add onto the simple fact that they had to pay all that money would have still brought them in debt. And I think France would have still cut off all their goods and property that the Haitians had reclaimed from them. So that's what I think.

Ferrales:

I felt like today's conversation was interesting. The students had really struggled in that class previously with making direct connections to the text. So I feel like they did a much better job than they have in the past of referencing the article, and pulling out quotes, and talking about what the quotes mean to them.

Based on what we've been saying about fighting for freedom before we have stability and security, would you say that the Haitian revolution was successful?

Student:

I think in a way it was successful to accomplish the goals that they had set out like basically to get their freedom and such things. I think that it just wasn't successful in the aspect of it didn't make them a successful country, or as independent and like stable as they should be.

Student:

This is why the Marines was able to come in, and take over, and cause so much trouble in the government, I think. Because although Haiti had freedom, they didn't have any stability in the government, no type of democracy to help them move on from the slavery.

Ferrales:

Something that they actually did a good job of was really, really digging into that question of whether or not freedom is more important than having stability in a country. So I think that's something they actually did really well. My goal in the conversation is to try and just guide them back to those big core understandings.

Do we think that it was worth fighting then? Or was it not worth fighting? Because they didn't ultimately have long term success. Terrell start us off since that was your comment.

Terrell:

I would feel like happy with accomplishing the goals of freedom or whatever because I'd rather be like free, even though I'm not in the best place with the best economy, I would still have my freedom, which is important.

In the class of like 20 other students, basically we can all have different ideas. And if some of those ideas goes against mine, it's important to hear what they have to say and be open to it, and see if it either changes my idea or just makes me like go even harder for my idea, per se.

Ferrales:

All students receive a grade. It's taken some time to sort of figure out what that would look like as a useful rubric. So it ranges from, "I was an active participant, "I took good notes, and I listened well," to, "I was able to push my peers by asking good questions and responding to them thoughtfully and with text-based evidence."

Good job, you guys. You guys did a nice job of talking about the text. What I'd like you to do is I'd like you to flip over your rubric, and on the back there are six questions that I want you to answer. Take like five minutes to answer these questions and then we're going to share out our thoughts about today's discussion.

And it's also really important for students to be able to self-assess the conversation at the end.

What are things people could do different next time, Cherise?

Cherise:

For me, personally, I think I should take notes on looseleaf so I can just like refer to my notes, and like write a title over it instead of like scattering through the article and like trying to go back to what I remember reading.

Ferrales:

Something that's really hard for teenagers, especially in academic environments, is to understand their own struggles, and to know how to improve their weaknesses.

Student:

Well, speaking for me, I feel like I should have more knowledge on each of the guiding questions because I was personally waiting for like a certain question to be asked so I can respond to that.

Student:

Use less opinions and more facts from like different texts.

Ferrales:

And so I think the more we talk about what did you do well, and maybe what's one thing you can work on, that makes it feel manageable to students if they're really focusing on one small thing that they're going to work on for the next time. So the culminating project for this course at the end of the year is a ten-page research paper. Students pick their own project, they get to pick any historical topic that they want, as long as it falls in the realm of global history. I think you guys did a better job this time of using text-based evidence than in previous discussions. It's really nice because I feel like the sharing that happens in that end project comes very authentically out of the more formal discussions that we're doing throughout the year.

All right, I'll see you guys on Wednesday, we're in this room. Thank you.