Socratic Seminar as Dialogue vs. Debate

The best Socratic Seminars are those in which something new and unexpected is discovered. This happens when the seminar is approached as a joint search or exploration through dialogue, rather than a defense of ideas.

In an AP Literature class, it is important to keep the conversation flowing. This happens better through dialogue than debate, which has the tendency to shut down conversation rather than encourage it.

Debate

- Debate is oppositional; two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.

- In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences and to counter arguments.

- Debate affirms a participant's point of view.

- Debate creates a close-minded attitude and a determination to be right and defends assumptions as truth.

- In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.

- Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

- In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.

- Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.

- Debate assumes a single right answer that someone already has.

- Debate demands a conclusion and a winner.

Dialogue

- Dialogue is collaborative with multiple sides working toward shared understanding.

- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning and to find common ground.

- Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude and an openness to being wrong and to change.

- In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it, rather than threaten it.

- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's reliefs.

- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions.

- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks tot to alienate or offend.

- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to workable solutions.

- Dialogue remains open-ended.