

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

WordPress Forums

Online Socratic Seminars

Directions: This year, we will have online Socratic seminars. Socratic seminars are based on the Socratic method and idea that students should think for themselves, rather than merely filling their heads with the “right” answers. Through the art of dialogue in a Socratic seminar, you will respond to questions with both answers and questions that further the discussion. This encourages divergent thinking and critically creative responses and inquiry. In the seminar, you will be responsible for examining a text (poem, novel, art, song lyrics, etc.) that everyone will collectively study. However, you will articulate individual responses to the open-ended questions that are posted online. It is important to remember that this is not about finding the right answer or giving the right answer, but asking the right questions that cause individuals to think critically and see a text from multiple perspectives.

Requirements: You are required to **respond to one of the open-ended questions (posted by me)**. Your response should be **at least 100 words**. Then, you must **ask one question**. Questions should be thorough and require a higher level of thought. Next, you must **respond to one of your classmate’s responses or questions**. You can answer a question from your perspective, disagree with someone’s post and offer an alternative perspective, or agree with someone’s post and add another layer to their perspective. Responses should be **at least 50 words**. However, you **MUST be RESPECTFUL** in all responses. Always **use complete sentences** and be sure to have a **thesis or topic sentence that names the text and author under analysis**. You must also back your post with **textual support** (at least one quote). See Effective Paragraphing handout under the Resources tab for further guidance.

- ✓ Answer an open-ended question (at least 100 words)
- ✓ Include a thesis or topic sentence
- ✓ State the title and author
- ✓ Include one piece of textual support using in-text MLA citations (a quote)
- ✓ Pose a question (deep & critical)
- ✓ Respond to another post (at least 50 words)

Example: Open-Ended Question

Throughout the novel, several different characters offer opinions about how the town is divided, and how it should be understood (white and black, by family, by class, etc.) Find one such explanation, describe it (a short quotation or two might help), and then explain the advantages and disadvantages of that particular definition.

Example: Answer Kinship in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee provides the framework for a closer analysis of the social hegemony of family status in Maycomb through socio-economic status, careers, and reputations passed down through generations.

In the classroom, Miss Gates inquires the meaning of “democracy” to which Scout replies with the motto, “Equal rights for all, special privileges for none” (245). While this is among the underlying foundational principles in the theory or ideology of democracy, its application in Maycomb County is far from the theoretical base. In Maycomb County, the traditions that have prevailed and the underlying ideologies that influence power mechanisms in society, have perpetuated a social hegemony, not only separating races, but also families. In Maycomb, the Finches are respected. However, as Jem clarifies to Scout, “All we’ve got’s background and not a dime to our names” (226). In response to Scout’s reiteration of Atticus’s views about the foolishness of upholding background, Jem specifies that the Finches are an “Old Family” in the sense that they can read and write (therefore giving them prestige in the social hierarchy). The importance and influence of literacy is upheld in Jem’s observation. The utilization of language as a mechanism to maintain power in certain groups is a technique that has been used throughout the centuries. Just as some of the White population prohibited education for slaves in order to maintain power in the nineteenth century, the English society did something very similar in the Middle Ages by teaching only the wealthy and prestigious members in society Latin. This cycle of allotting power due to the literacy and educational status of families is a theme that can be identified in contemporary society as well.

When Aunt Alexandra and Scout do not see eye-to-eye on the Cunninghams and the respective relationship, in line with social propriety, motivated by the social hegemony in Maycomb, Harper Lee seizes the opportunity to give insight into the differentiations between classes through the perspectives of the maturing Jem and the naïve-to-social-ways Scout. Jem attempts to explain his observations to Scout. He states, “There’s four types of folks in the world. There’s the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there’s the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes” (226). While Jem presents this information without fully comprehending the gravity of his insights, the reader notices the pertinence in this observation. First, Jem sees himself and his social crowd as “ordinary” or normal. Therefore, his observations are skewed through his subjective understanding of his and his family’s location in the social hierarchy. Second, Jem, without malicious intent, outlines the pecking order of Maycomb and demonstrates the passing of information from him to Scout. In the same way, each generation has maintained a reputation and proceeded to pass their understanding of their social standing to the generation that followed.

The advantages in this conceptualization entail a sense of identity and security for individuals at a higher level in the social hierarchy of the community. However, a disadvantage of the social hierarchy, though evident, is the lack of social mobility for lower classes in Maycomb.

Jem lists Negroes after the “Ewell type.” Throughout the text, Jem is confronting some very difficult thoughts and trying to make sense of and develop his own morals pertaining to what is right and what is wrong. Do you believe that by his listing the Negroes after the Ewells is a significant foreshadowing of the development of Jem’s understanding of the social hierarchy and further his evolving views pertaining to what justice entails?

Example: Response

I love your opening paragraph. It is demonstrated through-out the text that Maycomb does not practice democracy. I agree that Maycomb is ruled by its social class. Having an important family reputation gets you lots of places in Maycomb. The social class in Maycomb thrives because its citizens buy into it and behave according to their family history. In many cases people act a certain way because that is how they were raised and so it is not unheard of for children to follow the examples showed to them by their parents and that is how

the families of Maycomb stay the same from generation to generation. I will say that the Finch family is a "fine family" in Maycomb and that Atticus defending Tom Robinson caused people to look down on the Finch family, but I believe that Atticus never really bought in or behaved according to the Finch tradition. He is a man with his own opinions and acts according to what he believes is right, not by how his actions affect the family name. He begins to break down the power that the social structure in Maycomb has over its people. Aunty Alexandria however, is interested in upholding the Finch name and keeping up appearances. However, I don't think that Jem meant anything negative by putting Negroes after the Ewell type. He knows that Tom Robinson's case was unfair and unjust because the people of Maycomb county are prejudice. Jem has learned from Atticus and knows that it is wrong to judge a man based on the color of his skin. Based on this and Jem's personality as he grows during the novel, I find it hard to believe that Jem could ever conform to "jumping on the bandwagon" without first deciding what he believes.