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To the Teacher

Paideia Seminars or discussion seminars are wonderful strategies to get students thinking about a particular subject, article, idea, or book in a deep and meaningful way. This type of instruction prepares students for the 21st century by facilitating the development of communication skills, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and problem-solving. You can research Paideia Seminars on the web to learn more, but in this book, I have written about how I approach seminars in my own classroom with elementary students. Paideia Seminars are not at all intimidating to facilitate, and once you have done one or two, you will be hooked. Students begin to open up and share deep thoughts and ideas spawned from a particular subject or reading selection and by listening to their peers' ideas. Students may agree or disagree with their peers, but they learn to do both respectfully and with much thought. Students are given an opportunity to answer pre-seminar questions to get them thinking about the material. Then in the actual seminar, students are asked some of the same questions that they have previously reflected upon, but other questions are also asked to see how well they have connected the different themes, lessons, morals, characterization, and big ideas from the material. Students are asked to support their answers with details from the material, to make connections to other texts or real-world experiences, and to fully explain their answers. I use rubrics to grade my students on how thoroughly they participated in the seminar. Not only will you be hooked after facilitating these seminars, but your students will enjoy them as well!

I am not assigning a particular grade level to any of the seminars because different groups of children in varying grade levels may be able to handle the content and questioning of each seminar. However, read the books or stories first to see if your students will be able to handle the material. For example, *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry is chockfull of higher level vocabulary, so I use that story with my gifted 4th graders midyear right before the holidays, but this story could be used beyond elementary school.

Common Core Standards Addressed in Grades 3-5

Grade 3:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.2 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 4:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2 Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.3 Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

Grade 5:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 5 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.3 Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.4 Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

Conducting the Seminar

The way I conduct Paideia Seminars is I tell students that we are going to read a selection (book, article, story, etc.) and then we will participate in a Paideia Seminar. Of course, the first time I tell them this, they ask, “What is that?” I explain to them that it is a discussion seminar in which they will get to talk about the material we are reading with their classmates. I explain that they will need to know the material very well before we actually participate in the seminar because they must support their thoughts and opinions with valid details from the material. I tell them they may also use other text connections as well as real-world experience and research to support their answers. I explain that they will also have the opportunity to answer some pre-seminar questions to prepare their thoughts and opinions for the discussion seminar. I then explain to them that when we have the seminar that we will pull our chairs out from our desks/tables to form a huge oval so that all participants can see each other well. Students should use good eye contact and talk directly to other classmates using their names, so visibility of all students is a must. I explain to students that I am not the teacher during the seminar; I am only a facilitator who asks the questions that they will discuss with each other. Students are not answering my question to me; they use each question to spark a discussion with their classmates. They do not raise their hands, and I will not call on them to answer. It is their responsibility to answer the questions as they discuss with their peers. They must work out issues in discussions like whose turn it is to talk just as people do when they are in a group conversation. For example, if two students begin talking at once, one may nod for the other to go first. The whole group should take notice of that transaction, so that after the first person finishes talking the second person can talk before a “new” person begins giving their opinion. I explain all of this to students so they will understand when seminar day comes exactly how to participate. I also explain that I will be taking notes on how they respond. I tell them that any opinion is okay as long as it is well-supported and that I am looking for deep, novel, supported answers. I tell students they do not each have to respond to every question I ask, but that each student respond at least 3-4 times either in answering my question or responding to what another student has said.

Steps for the Seminar

1. Tell students the selection you will be focusing on and that you are going to have a seminar. (The selection may be in any subject: literature, math, science, social studies.)
2. Either read the selection together or students may read independently.
3. Give students pre-seminar questions to answer independently.
4. Grade the pre-seminar questions, but do not give back to students until after the seminar.
5. Plan what day students will participate in the seminar and announce it to them.
6. On the day of the seminar remind students of seminar behaviors, rules, etc. (I have included Seminar expectations.)
7. Seat students in an oval. Ask the first question.
8. Allow students time to answer the question and keep it going as long as new ideas are being offered and supported. Then ask the next question and continue in the same way.
9. Take notes while students are talking. I like to make a chart with all of my students' names. I make a column for the students' names, a column where I can tally how many times they speak, and one larger column where I can write specific things they said or whether it was a "disagree" opinion and/or if it had lots of details and support, etc. I have included a chart for your use. I tally responses in the categories and write notes or quotes to help me remember the responses, especially the unique answers. I only have 3 students on each page so I have plenty of room to record.
10. At the end, thank students for their participation.
11. The following day I talk to my students about the seminar: what went well, what didn't work, and what I would like to see the next time we participate in a seminar. I give back their pre-seminar questions and their rubric for the seminar. I allow students to ask me individually about their rubric score or the pre-seminar questions, so they may understand further what I am looking for.

Pre-Seminar Questions for Pinduli

By Janell Cannon



1. What prompted each animal to criticize another?

2. How do you feel about the idea that someone being mean to you could prompt you to be mean to someone else? Explain.

3. What do you think would have happened if the first animal that criticized another had not done so but instead said something kind?

4. How could this story have meaning in your own life? How could it apply to you?

Seminar Questions for Pinduli

By Janell Cannon



1. How do you think Pinduli felt about being criticized? What evidence from the story supports your answer?
2. How can a negative or unkind act from another affect the way you feel about yourself?
3. Have you ever had someone treat you unkindly for no reason? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
4. What is the lesson or moral that you learn from this story? Is there a well-known expression or saying that you think goes along with the moral from this story?
5. How can you apply this moral to your life?
6. How do you think the story would have been different if instead of criticizing the other animals, each animal had found something kind to say to each other?