



Common Core Language Standards: Speaking and Listening

Focus: The Paideia Seminar

Overview

Using the paideia method of discussion, students will explore a work by Amy Tan and learn to investigate key questions and use the text to support answers.

Standards

9-10.SL.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
- c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Objectives

- Students will learn how to conduct a paideia seminar
- To learn how students will feel during a paideia seminar
- To understand how the seminar can be used to facilitate knowledge of text and of self

Materials



- blank paper for you and for students to make name tags for their desks
- multi-colored pens or pencils
- photocopies of Amy Tan's "[Mother Tongue](#)"
- Computer and projector for video

Activity 1

Lecture

In ancient Greece, the word "paideia" meant more than "to educate." Paideia was a system of classical education in which students were educated in core texts and disciplines and exposed to that which was the best in the art, literature, history, and knowledge of their world.

Website

Show [the Paideia website](#) to students for their perusal. Emphasize that in a system of education modeled after the paideia method, students will work with source documents – that is, those core texts that form the backbone of Western and world literature and history – and proceed through three main stages:

- Pre-thought – A reflective investigation of the main ideas or concepts to be addressed
- Seminar – A group discussion centered on the text under discussion
- Reflection – A personal look back at the insights gained about the work

Have class jot down their own experiences with/opinions of the method, just as students would in a paideia seminar before discussion. Have class pair-share. Then have each student tell what his or her partner stated and discuss the information about the method.

Discussion Procedure

The paideia discussion commonly follows the procedure outlined [here](#). The following is adapted from the paideia.org site:

- *A Paideia Seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open-ended questions.*
- *The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the ideas and values from the text we are going to read, of ourselves, and of each other.*
- *As the seminar facilitator, I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes.*
- *As participants, I am asking you to think, listen, and speak candidly*



about your thoughts, reactions, and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other's names.

- *You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak; rather, you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.*
- *You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, "I disagree with Joanna because...", focusing on the ideas involved, not the individuals.*
- *"Now, let's think about how we normally participate in a discussion as a group. Is there a goal that we can set for ourselves that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? [Set group goal and display it for all to see.]*
- *Please consider the list of personal participation goals that I have listed on the board.*
 - *To speak at least three times*
 - *To refer to the texts in detail*
 - *To keep an open mind*
 - *To speak out of uncertainty*
- *Is there one that is a particular challenge for you personally? Will you choose one goal from the list and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have?... Please write your personal goal at the top of your copy of the text.*

For further reinforcement, students should see the clip of Thomas Duffy's explanation of the seminar method.

- [Clip link.](#)
- [Main page link.](#)

Discussion

Move class into a circle with a desk for you as well. Have class create a name tag visible across the room. While class displays their names, instructor creates a map of the class with names. (You will need pens of varying colors for this step since your task as a teacher is to keep track of who says what on what topic.)

A Brief Note About Whole-Class Discussion

The role of the teacher in class discussion is primarily to keep students *focused on the words*. In discussion, require students to explain what element or elements within the words led them to their conclusion. Four questions are absolutely essential to ask students during discussion – and to encourage students to ask of themselves and each other.

<h2 style="margin: 0;">WHY?</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think so? • Why does your line/your word/your evidence prove your point? • Why did the author use this particular word and not another, similar word?
<h2 style="margin: 0;">WHERE?</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where in the story/play/poem did you find your information? • Can you literally put your finger on the place in the text that proves your point?
<h2 style="margin: 0;">WHAT?</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you mean when you say " ____ "? • What does this quote you chose mean? Can you rephrase it? • What else could the author have said here? • What "work" is this word doing that a similar one would not do?

For some teachers, this role may represent a change from the usual classroom discussion. **The goal of the teacher is not to lead the students to a predetermined insight, but to communicate the crucial idea that although there may not be one “right answer,” there are better and worse ones – and the better ones *are* better because they are supported by the words of the author.**

Reading

Read/refresh class with Tan’s work. Have students create questions that elicit deep thought about the work and about its application to self and to society. Students will usually need help formulating good, productive questions relevant to discussion. The PDF file linked here will be very helpful: [Questions for Paideia Seminars](#). Additionally, you will probably want to have a few “discussion fallback” questions addressing central issues – especially the author’s main message about the central issues raised in the text. How does Tan invite us to think about these conflicts?



Small-Group and Whole-Group Discussion

Once each student has a goal set, ask students to share their thoughts of Tan's work with one neighbor. 4-5 minutes.

Share with the group. 45-50 minutes. While they are sharing with each other, you are writing down what they are saying on your previously drawn map. Each time they change topics, change colors.

Closure

Have the students look back at their original goals. Give them time to reflect on those goals. Did they answer the questions that they wanted? What new information did they learn? How well did they meet their personal performance goal?

Resources:

- [The Paideia Seminar](#)
- [Socratic Seminar pdf guide](#)
- [Socratic Seminar example](#)
- [Rubric for choosing texts](#)
- ["Mother Tongue"](#)
- [The U.S. Constitution](#)
- [Frankenstein](#)
- [Dead Poets Society: Poetry](#)
- [Declaration of Sentiments](#)

General for ELA:

- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
[ELA lesson plans](#)
- Alabama Learning Exchange - ALEX
[Home](#)
[Web resources for teachers](#)
[Lesson Plans for 11 - 12 ELA](#)
- San Diego Office of Education
[Teacher Tools](#)