From Paideia Active Learning, 5/31/2017. https://www.paideia.org/socratic-questioning/

**What makes a good Socratic seminar question?**

Good Socratic questions are always open-ended, thought-provoking, and clear.

**Open-ended:**Questions are designed to elicit multiple perspectives. Numerous answers can be correct as long as the students stay on topic.

**Thought-provoking:**To start, questions should spark numerous responses. Then, they should challenge students to evaluate and synthesize their ideas.

**Clear:**Participants should be able to understand right away what the facilitator is asking. This means phrasing questions carefully to keep them short and simple, even when the topic is complex.

### **OPENING QUESTIONS: WHAT IS THE TEXT ABOUT?**

The goal of opening questions is to engage all of the participants in identifying the main ideas in a text.

**Examples:**

* What word or phrase is most important?
* Which character is meant to be the hero or protagonist?
* What is the most surprising statement in the text?
* What is the most striking image or metaphor?
* What would be another good title for this piece?

### **CORE QUESTIONS: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IDEAS IN THE TEXT?**

The goal of core questions is to have the participants analyze the seminar text and develop their ideas about it.

**Examples:**

* Why is the argument structured in this way?
* What evidence does the author use to back up his or her point of view?
* What do the authors mean when they say \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
* How would the original audience have interpreted this statement?
* What is the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ?

During the seminar, facilitators ask increasingly demanding questions. They may ask participants to support their ideas with evidence from the text; to respond to another student’s point of view; to identify the assumptions behind their thinking; or to re-evaluate their ideas, considering other perspectives or evidence.

### **CLOSING QUESTIONS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?**

The goal of closing questions is for participants to consider the ideas and values from the text, in real-world applications.

**Examples:**

* What additional points should be included in this text?
* How would our daily lives be different without this concept or idea?
* In your opinion, is it morally right to take the action described in this text?
* Based on this story, do you think people’s actions are determined by fate or by choice?
* Which character are you most like? When have you behaved like the other character?

***The Things They Carried* Socratic Seminar Questions**

Directions: Answer each of the following questions (on a separate sheet of paper) in thoughtful, multi-sentence responses. Cite specific textual evidence as appropriate to support your responses. Highlighted = class made questions!

1. The narrator of *The Things They Carried* has the same name as the book's author. How did this affect your response to the book?
2. In the title story, how do the things the men carry help define them as individuals? What are some of the more interesting items? Which "things" were unexpected? What would you carry if you went to war?
3. Love –
   * 1. How does this story reflect the mentality of the Vietnam war veteran?
     2. What does Marth Represent?
     3. Can we be sure O’brien never mentioned the subject Cross wanted him not to?
     4. How does this relate to story-truth vs. happening-truth?
4. Spin – Azar says “what is everyone so upset about? I am just a boy” What does this say about eh draftees in the war?
5. At the end of "On the Rainy River," the narrator says, "I was a coward. I went to the war." What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
6. Enemies/Friends –
   * 1. When Dave Jensen breaks his own nose, does this make him and Strunk “even”?
     2. What was the agreement between Strunk and Jensen – what does this tell the reader about the war?
     3. Is Jensen wrong for not keeping his promise to Strunk?
     4. In either story are they truly ever friends or enemies?
7. In "How to Tell a True War Story," what does the narrator say on this subject? What do you think makes a true war story?
8. In "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," what causes the transformation in Mary Anne Bell? How does Rat Kiley's telling of the story add to the tension? What does the story say about the Vietnam experience?
9. Stockings – How does Dobbins symbolize America and why is he portrayed this way? If he symbolizes America, what do the pantyhose represent? Relate to after his girlfriend breaks up with him – how does this add to the symbolism?
10. Church – When Kiowa says it’s “wrong” to set up camp, what does it say about his character? What purpose to the monks serve in the story?

1. The Man I Killed – Why did O’brien add in details about Vietnamese solider? How are some of the details symbolic? What is the significance of the repeated phrases?
2. Ambush – How does the story show the emotional side of war? What connection to his daughter is he trying to make?
3. Style – What might the dancing symbolize? Why was Azar mocking the girl – what does that tell the reader about his character?
4. In "Good Form," the narrator says, "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." What does he mean by "story truth" and "happening-truth"? Why might one be "truer" than the other?
5. Can there be non-bloody war stories?
6. What feelings does O’brien have when telling his stories?
7. Why does O’brien remove himself from some of the stories – what effect does this have?
8. Is it ever ok to kill someone?
9. Even though *The Things They Carried* is set during the Vietnam War, in what ways is it relevant today, with regard to war and politics as well as our personal struggles?