

Introduction to Socratic Tutorials

The tutorial process is one of the most important of all Essentials. Without a well-run tutorial students often have difficulty getting the support they need in managing rigorous coursework. One way to introduce tutorials is to start with the “Father of all Tutorials”...Socrates.

A little history of Socrates can be solicited from students. If you start with “What do we (collectively) know about Socrates?”

Students at mid level and high school usually know enough to share that he was a teacher/tutor/philosopher, he was killed (the hemlock cocktail), etc. Some may even mention “Meno” his most esteemed student. An example of an exchange between Socrates and Meno might go something like this...

Meno...So, tell me Socrates, what is better, to go or to stay.

Socrates...Well, Meno...if you go, do you know where you will be going?

Meno...Sometimes. Other times I do not know where I am going.

Socrates...And when you do not know where you are going, Meno, is this a pleasant experience?

Meno...I should think not.

Socrates...If you stay here, Meno, will you know where you are?

Meno...Of course, Socrates. I'll be here with you!

Socrates...And is this a good thing?

Meno...Of course, Socrates. I like you. And I like it here!

Socrates...So, Meno, tell me then, is it better to go and possibly venture to an unknown place and be unpleasant or is it better to stay and be somewhere and with someone you like?

Meno...I should think it better to be somewhere I like and with someone I like!

Socrates...Meno, have you not answered your own question?

This method of introducing Socrates and his “Socratic Method of Questioning” is a good way to show students how tutors must respond when asked direct questions and how tutors lead students to knowledge.

A review of **Costa's Levels of Questioning**

(handout of activity 4) is valuable in guiding students in the development of level 2/3 questions.

** If students have not had sufficient practice with the levels of questioning it will be hard for them to develop level 2/3 questions for the tutorial.

Examples of Costa's Levels of Questions is a good exercise for them to get some practice on developing questions. A fun way to do this exercise is to pick an action hero, cartoon character, character from a fairy tale and then develop questions at all three levels. Once they begin to develop accurate questions this exercise can then be expanded to non-fictional characters or events. This is one area students need a great deal of practice.

The Follow-Up Questions can be used by tutors or by students if you are running peer tutorials. Have students include this handout in their notebooks for future reference during tutorials. Students should be trained to ask these kinds of questions in order to reaffirm their own knowledge, clarify uncertainties, or give one another a chance to articulate a process or piece of information.

To demonstrate tutorial practice, select 5 students, set them in a group and present them with this question “In what ways can we express the simple fraction $\frac{1}{4}$?”

Someone may offer up a decimal form, someone may suggest a graph form or percentage. Once you begin, the group will then begin to present equivalent ways of expressing $\frac{1}{4}$ and students then can be asked “Can you explain what you...”(**Follow-up Questions**).

The last thing that you may find beneficial is to have them do **Activity 6** which can be role played with tutorial groups with someone acting as the tutor and other students answering his/her “ Socratic style questions.” For example in the first problems, the lead “tutor” may ask something as simple as:

“Is this correct?” (student answers)

“What seems to be common with each incorrect answer?” (student answers)

“Does anyone recall what we do with the addition of fractions with common denominators?” (student answers)

You may want to provide your students with additional or different questions to practice this process.

The Tutorial is well covered in Region IV’s **Tutor Training** and in **Managing Tutorials**. It is highly recommended that you attend these workshops if you are new to the AVID Program. The “nuts and bolts” of developing and managing effective tutorials are well covered in these workshops.

Activities mentioned above may be found in the AVID Tutorial Coordinator Guide, Black Line Masters