

∞ *Environmental Observations of Jefferson* ∞

The Socratic Circle

Who is Socrates? Socrates was born (c.469-399 BC) in Athens, Greece. He was considered one of the greatest Greek philosophers. After he left his career as a sculptor, Socrates became known to others through his beliefs on humanity and justice in society. He believed in doing what was right in the midst of opposition. He was also a strong believer of the right of individuals to pursue knowledge, and he wanted to educate the citizens of Athens. He was famous for his numerous, never-ending questions. In order to determine the correct answer to his inquiries, he asked individuals many questions in order to elicit the correct response; and, perhaps, reveal that these individuals did not have any knowledge about a particular matter in the first place. At times, this became very frustrating to people; but, he insisted on obtaining a just, truthful answer. Some individuals perceived this to be a form of cross-examination. This method of intense questioning and answering became known as the “Socratic Method”. (Lincoln Library Press, 2008). Many people became followers of Socrates’ philosophy. They regarded him as a notable educator; but, he never accepted any money as he shared his educational philosophies with others. (Lincoln Library Press, 2008).

Today, in class, you and some of your classmates are going to form a Socrates Circle in which an “inner circle” will be discussing a topic while the “outer circle” will be observing and listening to your dialogue. There will be a specific amount of time allotted for the “inner circle” to discuss the topic, and, afterwards, the “outer circle” will offer their feedback on the “inner circle’s” dialogue. At the conclusion of the feedback, the circles are switched. The “inner circle” students’ roles are reversed, and they will be offering feedback as the newly formed “outer circle” and vice-versa for the other students. As a participant of this Socrates Circle, you will be focusing on an in-depth discussion about a particular topic. Create a constructive dialogue with your classmates. Primarily, as you begin to dialogue with your peers, remember to: Think first...then answer or ask a question. The time that you use to formulate an appropriate response will be valuable, and you will probably be allowed a short amount of time to do so as other members of the circle take their turns in the discussion.

Have confidence in yourself, and...

1. Listen calmly to others’ viewpoints.
2. Maintain an interest in what the other person is communicating (use assuring gestures such as nodding your head in agreement, saying comments such as, “I see...”; “Ah-ha...”).

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3. Have mutual respect in a conversation—it's a collaborative effort. A conversation or discussion is not one-sided. A speaker and listener is involved, and every effort should be made to allow equal time for both parties to share information.