

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

**Grade Levels:** 10-12 (AP and Honors)

**Time Commitment:** 90 Minutes Prereading; 90 minutes for seminar

**Subject(s):** Economics, AP US Government, AP. European History,  
World History

**Overview:** This lesson offers detailed instructions on how to run a Socratic Seminar and provides specific resources for a Socratic Seminar lesson using readings from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

**Materials:**

- Scissors
- Markers
- Desks organized in Concentric Circles
- Paper
- Student Handouts

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## Opener (20 Minutes):

1. Learn about Smith's thoughts on division of labor and create Yodas using the *Yoda, Smith, and the Division of Labor* lesson plan.

## Pre-Work (90 Minutes)

1. Tell students that they will be participating in a Socratic Seminar. Explain that a Socratic Seminar is based on the teaching method used by Socrates and centers on the idea that deep learning happens through asking and answering questions and discussion.
  - a. Students will read excerpts from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and then engage in a student-led discussion about the text.
  - b. Remind students that coming to class on the day of the seminar without preparation will mean that **they will be unable to participate**.
2. Share the Socratic Seminar Preparation for Students (Page 4). Provide students with hard copies of The Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar reading (Pages 5-10). Students *must* do a close reading of this text before the seminar.
  - Students should complete the Socratic Seminar Quotes from the Text Form (Page 11) and the Socratic Seminar Questions Form (Page 12).
  - Give students time to read the resources and complete their annotations, quotes, and questions forms. This can be done in class or outside of class. Having this pre-work completed is mandatory for participation in the seminar.

## Activity (90 Minutes):

1. Follow the detailed instructions for How to Run the Socratic Seminar (Page 3)
2. Give students a hard copy of the Student Observation Tracker (Pages 13 and 14) they will use to evaluate their partner.
  - a. See Page 15 for a Sample Rubric you can use to evaluate student performance.

## Closer (5 Minutes):

1. Allow students to share feedback from their Student Observation Trackers with their partners, then collect the trackers.
2. Ask the whole class for their key takeaways from the seminar. These should include:
  - i. The efficiency gains allowed through division of labor and specialization
  - ii. The benefits of allowing people and nations the free flow of trade, capital, and labor.

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## Tips & Tricks for the Activity

- For higher-level honors/AP classes, it may work to allow students to prepare outside of class.
- For lower-level classes, allowing in-class time may be a better strategy.
- If students do not complete the preparation materials, do not allow them to participate in the seminar.
  - Provide a separate space for them and give them an alternative assignment.
- There are digital apps you can use to track student participation throughout the seminar (check out [Equity Maps!](#))
- Find a space where you can arrange student desks in an inner/outer circle. If your classroom doesn't allow for this, reserve a space on campus that is better suited (media center, conference room, etc).

## Extension Activity Ideas

- Require students to complete a reflection of the seminar, including a self-evaluation of their own performance.
- Once you master the Socratic Seminar format, you can use this with almost any text. It can be used with primary sources, current events, artwork, and data analysis, etc.

## Modified Activity Ideas

- The readings can be modified for your class level. Use one, two, or all three of the readings as provided, or use an AI tool to modify the text to a more appropriate Lexile level.
- Add scaffolds such as definitions for more difficult terms.
- Further chunk the text and add guided questions.
- For students who are extremely shy, speaking in class can be a challenge. Allow a “spokesperson” for each partner pair, with a designated speaker who makes points that are supported by their “silent” partner. ‘
- Allow students to earn “redemption” points after the seminar.
  - Tell students that if they feel like their performance during the seminar did not accurately reflect their level of preparation and attention, they can submit written evidence of what they did to prepare.
  - Include a list of points they would have made and questions they would have asked.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Assignment Prep

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

### TEACHER SOCRATIC SEMINAR PREPARATION

#### BEFORE

1. Select a text that requires a deep read and will elicit conversation.
2. Give students several days or class time to prepare. Students should prepare according to the Student Socratic Seminar Preparation Sheet (Page 4)

#### ON THE DAY- Before the seminar

1. Before the seminar, divide the class into two teams, each student paired with another. Random Team Generator works great,
2. Give all students a copy of the Observation Tracker.
3. Arrange the desks in two concentric circles. Designate an “inner” group and an “outer” group.

#### ON THE DAY- During the seminar

1. Start by having the inner group go around and share their favorite quote or a quote they found most meaningful/significant.
2. Once everyone has spoken, invite the group to begin the conversation by asking someone to pose a question to the group.
3. Remind students that all discussion should be TEXT-based. If students start to get off base, guide them back to the text.
4. If there is a lull in the conversation, ask another prepared question.
5. Keep track of student participation through a conversation map. (Mark comments with a check, text-based comments with a +).
6. Midway through the inner group’s discussion, have them consult their evaluators for feedback and tips on their performance.
7. Reconvene and continue the discussion.
8. Switch the inner and outer groups and continue.
9. Collect evaluations and student preparation materials (Socratic Seminar Quotes from the Text and Socratic Seminar Questions form)

#### AFTER THE SEMINAR

1. Evaluate students based on their preparation for the seminar, their performance during the seminar, and their evaluation of their partner.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Assignment Prep

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

### SOCRATIC SEMINAR PREPARATION

**1. Read and annotate the text.** Use these strategies when annotating:

- Underline important terms.
- Circle definitions and meanings.
- Write keywords and definitions in the margin.
- Signal where important information can be found with keywords or symbols in the margin.
- Write short summaries in the margin at the end of sub-units.
- Write questions in the margin next to the section where the answer is found.
- Indicate steps in a process by using numbers in the margin.

**2. Answer the guided reading questions.**

**3. Prepare the Socratic Seminar Quotes from the Text form. Select 4 quotes.** Each should include:

- An explanation in your own words about what the quote means
- The source of the quote
- Why you think this quote is significant

**4. Prepare Socratic Seminar Questions form.** Write 4 questions to pose to your peers.

NOTE: This shouldn't be a factual question but should be designed to facilitate a meaningful, deep discussion about the text. Need some help thinking of good questions?

Check out these question stems. Each question should include:

- A connection to the text
- YOUR answer to this question

**On the day of the seminar, you must have:**

- Your annotated text
- The reading guide questions
- The Socratic Seminar Quotes from the Text Form
- Socratic Seminar Questions form.

**You will not be allowed to participate in the seminar without these.**

During our seminar, we will have an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle will talk about the text while the outer circle evaluates the performance of their matched peer. After some time, students will trade places, and the inner circle will become the outer circle.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*

selected readings

(resources adapted from [adamsmithworks.org](http://adamsmithworks.org))

Background: Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was initially published in 1776. Smith analyzes the elements of a political economy - tax, trade, division of labor, market pricing, and other aspects that affect economic behavior. He argues in favor of free trade, free markets, and limited governments.

## READING #1 Excerpts from Book One Chapter I: Of the Division of Labor

The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is any where directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour.

To take an example... in which the division of labour has been very often taken notice of, the trade of the pin-maker; a workman not educated to this business (which the division of labour has rendered a distinct trade), nor acquainted with the use of the machinery employed in it (to the invention of which the same division of labour has probably given occasion), could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin in a day, and certainly could not make twenty. But in the way in which this business is now carried on, not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades. One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; ... the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands... I have seen a small manufactory of this kind where ten men only were employed, ... they could, when they exerted themselves, make among them about twelve pounds of pins in a day. ... Those ten persons, therefore, could make among them upwards of forty-eight thousand pins in a day... But if they had all wrought separately and independently, and without any of them having been educated to this peculiar business, they certainly could not each of them have made twenty, perhaps not one pin in a day; that is, certainly, not the two hundred and fortieth, perhaps not the four thousand eight hundredth part of what they are at present capable of performing, in consequence of a proper division and combination of their different operations.

...The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive powers of labour...

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations  
selected readings

## READING #1 Excerpts from Book One Chapter I: Of the Division of Labor *Continued*

This great increase of the quantity of work which, in consequence of the division of labour, the same number of people are capable of performing, is owing to three different circumstances; first to the increase of dexterity in every particular workman; secondly, to the saving of the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another; and lastly, to the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labour, and enable one man to do the work of many.

First, the improvement of the dexterity of the workman necessarily increases the quantity of the work he can perform; and the division of labour, by reducing every man's business to some one simple operation, and by making this operation the sole employment of his life, necessarily increases very much the dexterity of the workman...

Secondly, the advantage which is gained by saving the time commonly lost in passing from one sort of work to another, is much greater than we should at first view be apt to imagine it. It is impossible to pass very quickly from one kind of work to another; that is carried on in a different place, and with quite different tools... this cause alone must always reduce considerably the quantity of work which he is capable of performing.

Thirdly, and lastly, every body must be sensible how much labour is facilitated and abridged by the application of proper machinery. It is unnecessary to give any example... A great part of the machines made use of in those manufactures in which labour is most subdivided, were originally the inventions of common workmen, who, being each of them employed in some very simple operation, naturally turned their thoughts towards finding out easier and readier methods of performing it.

It is the great multiplication of the productions of all the different arts, in consequence of the division of labour, which occasions, in a well-governed society, that universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people. Every workman has a great quantity of his own work to dispose of beyond what he himself has occasion for; and every other workman being exactly in the same situation, he is enabled to exchange a great quantity of his own goods for a great quantity, or, what comes to the same thing, for the price of a great quantity of theirs. He supplies them abundantly with what they have occasion for, and they accommodate him as amply with what he has occasion for, and a general plenty diffuses itself through all the different ranks of the society.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations  
selected readings

## **READING #2: Book One Chapter II: Of the Principle which gives Occasion to the Division of Labor**

This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.

...It is common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals, which seem to know neither this nor any other species of contracts... In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons. In almost every other race of animals each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is entirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creature.

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of.

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

...As it is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase, that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour. In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison with his companions; and he finds at last that he can in this manner get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of armourer.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations  
selected readings

## **READING #2: Book One Chapter II: Of the Principle which gives Occasion to the Division of Labor *Continued***

Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbours, who reward him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, till at last he finds it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a brazier; a fourth a tanner or dresser of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business...

As it is this disposition which forms that difference of talents, so remarkable among men of different professions, so it is this same disposition which renders that difference useful... Among men... the most dissimilar geniuses are of use to one another; the different produces of their respective talents, by the general disposition to truck, barter, and exchange, being brought, as it were, into a common stock, where every man may purchase whatever part of the produce of other men's talents he has occasion for.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations  
selected readings

## READING #3 Book Four Chapter 2 Of Restraints upon the Importation from Foreign Countries

...Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of the society, which he has in view. But the study of his own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily, leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society. First, every individual endeavours to employ his capital as near home as he can, and consequently as much as he can in the support of domestic industry...

Secondly, every individual who employs his capital in the support of domestic industry, necessarily endeavours so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest possible value.

...He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.

...To give the monopoly of the home-market to the produce of domestic industry, in any particular art or manufacture, is in some measure to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, and must, in almost all cases, be either a useless or a hurtful regulation. If the produce of domestic can be brought there as cheap as that of foreign industry, the regulation is evidently useless. If it cannot, it must generally be hurtful. It is the maxim of every prudent master of a family never to attempt to make at home what it will cost him more to make than to buy. The taylor does not attempt to make his own shoes, but buys them of the shoemaker. The shoemaker does not attempt to make his own clothes, but employs a taylor. The farmer attempts to make neither the one nor the other, but employs those different artificers. All of them find it for their interest to employ their whole industry in a way in which they have some advantage over their neighbours, and to purchase with a part of its produce, or what is the same thing, with the price of a part of it, whatever else they have occasion for.

What is prudence in the conduct of every private family can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom. If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry employed in a way in which we have some advantage.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations  
selected readings

## **READING #3 Book Four Chapter 2 Of Restraints upon the Importation from Foreign Countries** *Continued*

To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it. Not only the prejudices of the public, but what is much more unconquerable, the private interests of many individuals, irresistibly oppose it. Were the officers of the army to oppose with the same zeal and unanimity any reduction in the numbers of forces with which master manufacturers set themselves against every law that is likely to increase the number of their rivals in the home-market; were the former to animate their soldiers in the same manner as the latter enflame their workmen to attack with violence and outrage the proposers of any such regulation, to attempt to reduce the army would be as dangerous as it has now become to attempt to diminish in any respect the monopoly which our manufacturers have obtained against us. This monopoly has so much increased the number of some particular tribes of them that, like an overgrown standing army, they have become formidable to the government, and upon many occasions intimidate the legislature. The Member of Parliament who supports every proposal for strengthening this monopoly is sure to acquire not only the reputation of understanding trade, but great popularity and influence with an order of men whose numbers and wealth render them of great importance. If he opposes them, on the contrary, and still more if he has authority enough to be able to thwart them, neither the most acknowledged probity, nor the highest rank, nor the greatest public services can protect him from the most infamous abuse and detraction, from personal insults, nor sometimes from real danger, arising from the insolent outrage of furious and disappointed monopolists.

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Socratic Seminar Quotes

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Select four quotes from the text you think are significant and analyze them. Be prepared to discuss these quotes in our seminar. Feel free to use another sheet of paper if needed.

| Quote | Analysis                                                       |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|       | Source:<br><br>Explain in your own words:<br><br>Significance: |
|       | Source:<br><br>Explain in your own words:<br><br>Significance: |
|       | Source:<br><br>Explain in your own words:<br><br>Significance: |
|       | Source:<br><br>Explain in your own words:<br><br>Significance: |

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Socratic Seminar Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Come up with four questions for your peers that connect to the text. These should be thought-provoking questions designed to elicit conversation, not fact-based questions.

***Example:** Smith illustrates the efficiency of division of labor by talking about how pins are made in a factory. Give a modern example of how division of labor increases efficiency and productivity.*

| Question | Connnection to the Text | Your Answer |
|----------|-------------------------|-------------|
|          |                         |             |
|          |                         |             |
|          |                         |             |
|          |                         |             |

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Socratic Seminar Observations

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Each time your partner does one of the following, put a check in the box.

### Speaks in the discussion

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### Refers to evidence/text

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### Asks a new or follow-up question

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### Responds to another speaker

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### Paraphrases or adds to another speaker's ideas

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### Encourages another participant to speak

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Any of the following behaviors will COST points. Please keep track of any of these behaviors.

- Interrupts another speaker
- Engages in side conversation
- Dominates the conversation
- Shows disrespect

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What was the most interesting thing your partner said?

What would you like to have said in the discussion?

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

## Socratic Seminar Observations

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

**Record your partner's comments here (you can summarize if necessary)**

Question posed to the group? \_\_\_\_\_

Response to \_\_\_\_\_'s question

Connection to \_\_\_\_\_ comment/ response

Question posed to the group? \_\_\_\_\_

Response to \_\_\_\_\_'s question

Connection to \_\_\_\_\_ comment/ response

Question posed to the group? \_\_\_\_\_

Response to \_\_\_\_\_'s question

Connection to \_\_\_\_\_ comment/ response

Question posed to the group? \_\_\_\_\_

Response to \_\_\_\_\_'s question

Connection to \_\_\_\_\_ comment/ response

# Wealth of Nations Socratic Seminar

Socratic Seminar Sample Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

| Rubric                 | Engagement                                                                                                                                       | Use of Text                                                                                                | Questions and Connections                                                                                         | Openness                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5<br>Exemplary         | Demonstrates thoughtful and active participation throughout seminar. Active body language, consistent eye contact, nonjudemental and respectful. | Initiates specific references to text to support and defend ideas without external prompting               | Questions and comments are insightful and contribute to deeper meaning. Presents new ideas and makes connections. | Accepts points of view other than their own and uses them to expand their own ideas and discover new meaning about concepts. |
| 4<br>Accomplished      | Demonstrates active participation throughout seminar, stays on task, often makes eye contact, has general respect, and invites others to join    | Makes specific references to text to support ideas. Uses text effectively when challenged to do so         | Questions and comments are insightful and relevant, but do not offer significantly new insights or ideas.         | Accepts points of view of others and attempts to use them to expand their own ideas, but may reflect set thinking.           |
| 3<br>Average           | Demonstrates active participation and stays on task most of the time. Body language and eye contact show some engagement                         | Occasionally makes references to text to support and defend ideas, but may have to be challenged to do so. | Questions and comments are relevant, but do not move the group forward to a deeper understanding.                 | Acknowledges other points of view, but may try to argue or refute them. There's a lack of flexibility.                       |
| 2<br>Needs Improvement | Participates, but is off task. Lacks eye contact and/or is disengaged. Demonstrates lack of support and/or respect.                              | Makes few references to text and is unable to defend origin of ideas when challenged to do so              | Questions and comments reveal personal reactions, but lack insight                                                | Argues with other points of view and is reluctant to acknowledge them as possible or relevant.                               |
| 1<br>Undeveloped       | Is a passive observer of the seminar and/or is off task. Does not listen, makes no attempt to be inclusive, is disrespectful                     | Makes no references to text to support and defend ideas. Ideas don't really make sense.                    | Questions and comments are illogical, difficult to follow, and offer no benefit to the group.                     | Does not acknowledge or accept other points of view.                                                                         |

This Lesson Plan was created by:  
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