The Socratic Seminar

What is it?

The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates’ theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with “right” answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. The seminar will serve as an intellectual ‘argument.’

How will this work?

Preparation (20 minutes)

You will use what you have learned in class about the Constitution and the arguments between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists regarding how much power the federal government should have. You should consider how much power the federal government should have in order to fulfill the five purposes of government. The sources we have read in class focus mainly on the purposes of Protecting Rights and Rule of Law. You may also include arguments that you feel pertain to Providing Public Services, Providing a Common Defense and Supporting the Economic System. Use the index card provided to write notes on what you think are the positive and negative aspects of each side’s arguments. Remember, you will be discussing/arguing with others in the class so be sure to anticipate the other point of view and have notes to support why they would be wrong.

Seminar (40 minutes)

You will sit in the circle with the instructor and use the questions/notes you have gathered to argue your point of view. Although at times these debates can get rather heated, please remember that it is an ‘intellectual’ argument. You must raise your hand to be acknowledged and any yelling or profane language will serve as a point deduction.