

I have done socratic seminars with a class as large as 25. For that size, I would recommend one of 3 options:

1. Fishbowl style – 6-8 students sit in the center of the class in a circle and debate and discuss while the rest of the class surrounds them. These students can be actively engaged in taking notes, live-blogging, having a backchannel discussion about the seminar, tracking and evaluating the speakers, etc.

2. Rotating fishbowl – for this one, I have 4 – 6 seats in the center and students rotate through those. Only students in the “hot seats” may speak and one chair must always be left open. The first person in must be the first one out. When a new person enters the circle, the student who has been in the fishbowl the longest must leave.

3. Team fishbowl seminar – this is a great way to introduce your students to socratic seminars. Put students into teams of 3 or 4; when you ask a question, give them a set amount of time (2-3 minutes) to discuss the topic with their team, then ask the speaker for each team to engage in the discussion with the rest of the speakers in the fishbowl.

4. Get the class in one big circle and “go for it.” This works best if it isn’t their first rodeo. You can track who speaks and how often, maybe inviting the reluctant ones into the conversation once in a while.

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