

Socratic Seminar: *The Universe*
Literature Studies

Pre-Seminar – Students will read the poem “The Universe” by May Swenson. Students need to read the poem actively, using those strategies that are most suited to poetry reading (connections, questions, vocabulary, diction, structure, figurative language, imagery, and voice).

Tomorrow, we will extend the pre-seminar to include a day of working with a partner in the classroom. In order to be allowed to work with a partner, you must have done your own active reading. Students will partner up and discuss their own active reading, learning from and working with each other, and attempt to extend his/her understanding of the poem. At the end of the hour, students will also be given a short excerpt written by Tom Hansen from a journal of literary criticism entitled *The Explicator*. As final preparation for the seminar, students will read this excerpt, applying what they learn to better understand the poem.

Remember that your active reading notes are your ticket to enter the seminar. Without them, you will take notes over the entire seminar and surrender your opportunity to earn seminar points.

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Post-Seminar – Students will read the handout entitled “Important Questions” and follow the directions at the top of the page. This work is due tomorrow.

Important Questions Post-Seminar

Spend a few moments looking through the questions that have been posed below. You may go through the list and mark the ones that peak your interest, or mark those that are particularly perplexing to you. If you choose, you may even write some questions of your own that are not on the list. This is not an exhaustive list, but was created to get you thinking. You may use these, or your own. Choose at least five questions from this list (or those of your own) and write your thoughts regarding the question. You do not have to write a lengthy essay about each one, but you need to write in enough detail so that all of your thoughts about the question are represented, including those things you do and do not understand about the question, why that particular question interests you, what the implications are for answering the question, etc. Consider the question from as many sides as you can and write honestly about it from your perspective.

Here are the questions. You may use these questions as-is, or use these as a guide to form your own questions.

Does God exist?

Is there life after death?

Are you here for a purpose?

How was life first created? Is it evolution, or is there a plan (a design)?

Are all religions of equal value, or does one possess the truth?

What is the perfect government?

Is there such a thing as universal rights and wrongs?

Is there such a thing as truth?

Is there life beyond our own planet?

Why are you, you?

What is love?

How much money is enough?

What is real happiness?

If there is no God, can there be such a thing as a purpose?

If there is no purpose, then can there be any morality?

If there is no morality, are all things permissible?

If there is a God, why is there pain and suffering in the world?

Do I matter?

Can good exist without evil?

Can right exist without wrong?