NON-NEGOTIABLES

1. **Refer to the text.** This is all about a specific text, if participants go in a direction in which they cannot cite evidence from the text, they are not actually practicing Socratic Seminar skill — they are soap-boxing with their own opinions and ideas.

2. **Watch your time.** For all participants to get to participate, people can’t speak for much more than 1-2 minutes on average. For the most part, a speaker will finish their point in 30 seconds or so, but some like to talk and talk and talk... The converse is true too, some are thinking *incredible* ideas, but only speak for a few seconds – if that’s you – develop your idea!

3. **Consider other views.** The whole purpose of discussing an issue with others is to see what they think too. Keep your mind open to their ideas and see if it’s something you can agree with! They might use logic and good reason to persuade you and you will appreciate their effort – you could end up doing the same for someone else.

4. **Think out loud.** Some people just need to start talking to get to their actual thought. That’s okay! Sometimes you are on the verge of breakthrough in terms of insight on an issue – then, it just takes starting the thought. Your brain will finish it! Let it get to work!

5. **Read accurately and closely.** Read well when you annotate in preparation for the seminar. Then, read well as you use examples from the text. Understand pronouns and the antecedents to which they refer. Understand which subjects go with which verbs in a sentence. Use the text to defend points you make well.

6. **Build meaning.** You should never leave a seminar having not learned anything. Always leave a smarter person. This should come from your own process of evaluating and interpreting what you read and what others’ said that you appreciated.

7. **Treat the seminar as a respectful dialogue.** This is a discussion, and the leader does not need to dictate who speaks when – so NO HAND RAISING. Just talk. But talk with respect for others’ feelings and at a time when you would not be interrupting others.

8. **Refer to others by NAME.** Sometimes making name tags or name tents is a great way to place a tool for others to see to be able to call peers by name – this personalizes the process and makes referencing previous comments made easier. It also contributes to the sincerity of the process.

9. **Give your best to the task.** Don’t be distracted by your phone or a friend – genuinely seek to contribute to the reading and the seminar for the purpose of increasing your own learning.
CREATING NORMS

Students need routines. They want to know what to expect and what’s expected of them. Sometimes we create rules, expectations, or guidelines – but the word “norm” takes all authoritarian rule out of those other terms. I like to take the non-negotiables and have the class help me create a list of further normal behaviors we want to expect from each other to make the Socratic Seminar process enjoyable.

Some norms I’ve seen in the past:

- Refrain from judgmental remarks or gestures when someone’s idea disagrees with yours. In short, don’t judge.
- Stop side-conversations.
- Keep your text open on your desk.
- No phones.
- Be real.
- Invite others to speak.
- Ask questions to keep the seminar going.
- Respond to others’ remarks.

When I introduce Socratic Seminar, I distribute some of these handouts in explaining the process. But when it comes to discussing norms – I often give the non-negotiables, and then ask students what else they want to establish and I write those on the board. Then we split into small groups or partners and make posters of the norms to place around the room. We value large lettering, symbols, color, and a short clever explanation.