PRACTICAL **GUIDE** FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION BASED ON THE SOCRATIC METHOD

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Introduction

The educational guide presented here is one of the products of the research project "*Irene*: A Workbook based on Classical Literature for Conflict Resolution." This project was developed by an interdisciplinary team with the aim of integrating the teaching of the subject of peace education into secondary education institutions in Colombia. The *Irene* project uses classical texts from Greek and Roman literature as educational tools that promote critical reflection, constructive dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. This guide focuses on an adaptation of the Socratic method to be applied in various contexts. We propose a methodology of debate that does not focus on determining who is right, but rather on the search for consensus in an environment that encourages respect for the diversity of opinions and the collective construction of solutions.

The purpose of the guide is to engage participants in a dialogue process that will allow them to address different types of conflicts (interpersonal, social, political) and develop essential skills for peaceful coexistence, empathy, and critical thinking. Originally designed for the school environment, the material can be used in a wide variety of settings. Teachers, workshop leaders, or facilitators can implement it in diverse contexts where the goal is to foster dialogue based on the dialectical principles of the Socratic method, adapted for conflict resolution.
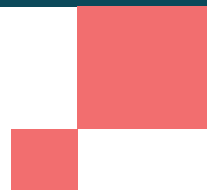
The *Irene* project and this guide, in particular, highlight the importance of the humanities as a valuable means of addressing contemporary issues such as peace, justice, and coexistence. Their focus on human nature and on understanding of contexts can contribute to social transformation.

The development of this project has been made possible thanks to the financial support of the Universidad de La Sabana, King's College London, Universidade do Estado do Amazonas, and the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), all institutions committed to promoting peace and education through transdisciplinary approaches.

We invite you to freely use this material in printed or digital form. We also encourage its adaptation to meet the needs of your context, in which case we kindly ask you to cite the project: "*Irene*: A Workbook based on Classical Literature for Conflict Resolution (HUM-13-2024)." Additionally, we would love to receive your questions, comments, feedback, and audiovisual evidence of its implementation, which we can share on the project's website and social media. Your contributions will help improve the guide, spread the adaptation of the Socratic method, and foster an exchange of valuable experiences and best practice. Please send your contributions via https://proyectoirene.pages.dev/ or @irene_paz_col on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Thank you for your collaboration as we continue building together!

What is the Socratic Method?

The Socratic method is a process of dialogue and reasoning based on the confrontation of opposing ideas through the exchange of questions and answers. In the adaptation presented in this guide, the participants aim to delve into a topic, not with the intention of winning a debate, but to collectively reach a clearer and more consensual understanding of the issue being discussed. Each question posed and each answer given leads to deeper reflection, allowing a conclusion to be collaboratively constructed with the contributions of all participants in the discussion.

The Socratic method has been widely used in education since antiquity. It features in the Platonic dialogues, where Plato, in his own way, recreates the conversations that his teacher Socrates had with others to analyze philosophical and political topics. Instead of imparting knowledge in a unidirectional way through the teacher's exposition, this adaptation of the Socratic method seeks to reach consensus through dialogue. In this process, the teacher, workshop leader, or facilitator has the role of guiding the formulation of questions and helping to validate the answers.

One of the greatest strengths of the Socratic method is that it fosters critical thinking. Participants are encouraged not only to question their own ideas but also to consider the perspectives of others. In this way, the Socratic process enhances the ability to analyze, reflect, and respect diverse opinions, as each person can contribute their own perspective. This approach also promotes introspection, as it invites participants to examine their own points of view and remain open to revising them as a result of collective dialogue.

By its nature, this method is particularly valuable for developing conflict resolution skills, as it teaches participants not only to engage in dialogue and listen actively but also to address disagreements in a constructive manner. The Socratic process transforms differences of opinion into opportunities for mutual understanding, creating a space where solutions are not imposed but collectively built. In this way, participants learn to negotiate and reach consensus with the goal of resolving conflicts peacefully and respectfully.

What skills are aimed to be developed?

The adaptation of the Socratic method aims to develop a series of skills in participants that go beyond the mere memorization of concepts or knowing who is right. These skills are fundamental for fostering critical thinking and peaceful coexistence. Below are the key skills that this method seeks to develop:

Analysis and synthesis Participants learn to analyze and synthesize information to achieve a better understanding of a topic. This involves breaking ideas down into their simplest parts for thorough examination and then integrating them into a coherent vision.

1.

Critical thinking: our method fosters the ability to question and evaluate ideas and arguments by identifying possible contradictions, biases, fallacies, or inconsistencies. This helps participants develop sharper judgment and better discernment between different viewpoints.

2.

3. **Assertive communication:** Participants are encouraged to express their thoughts and emotions clearly and respectfully while also learning to listen to and value the opinions of others. As a result, constructive dialogue is strengthened, and an environment of mutual respect and understanding is promoted.

4. **Reflection and self-criticism:**
The Socratic process encourages participants to reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions. This introspection allows them to assess the scope and limitations of their own opinions, fostering self-criticism and personal growth.

C How to implement the Socratic method?

Implementing the Socratic method in environments where constructive dialogue is encouraged requires following a series of steps that guide participants through a process of analysis and reflection. The estimated time for the activity is one hour. Below is a simple methodology to apply this approach.

I **Preparatory Activity**

The initial reflection and participation guidelines outlined below can be read in turns by the participants. Any questions that arise can be answered as the discussion progresses. To foster discussion, additional questions may be asked, such as: "What is an opinion?" "What is an argument?" "What do we mean by 'active listening'?" "Do we know how to engage in constructive dialogue?" etc.

Initial reflection: The teacher, workshop leader, or facilitator should start with a reflection to encourage participants to question how they interact with the opinions of others. The following text may be used:

Often, we do not agree with the opinions of our family, friends, colleagues, or peers. But how can we be so sure that person is wrong? Have we ever asked them why they think that way? Have we taken the time to carefully analyze their arguments? Are our emotions or our reasoning telling us that they are wrong?

The Socratic method is a way of learning to find consensus through dialogue. It is not an easy task, but if we use active listening, respect others beyond their opinions, analyze before passing judgment based on fleeting emotions, and express ourselves with well-founded arguments, the results may surprise us.

photo by: profzucker on VisualHunt

Participation Guidelinesa

For the Socratic dialogue to be effective, it is essential to establish a set of participation guidelines that ensure mutual respect and the smooth exchange of ideas. These guidelines help all participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ensure the process is constructive and collaborative. Below are some basic rules that can be adapted to each context:

1

Raise your hand to speak: All
participants should raise their hand to ask for the floor before speaking. This ensures order in the discussion and allows everyone to be heard without interruptions.

2

Brief and clear interventionsAs
Interventions should be concise and well-supported. Avoid speaking too long to give others the opportunity to participate. A good intervention includes a clear argument and, if possible, supporting evidence.

3

Respect for opinions of others: É It is
essential that each participant listens actively and respects the opinions of others, even if they disagree. Disagreements should be expressed respectfully, using phrases like "In my opinion, I believe that..." or "I think there is another perspective..."

4

Avoid interruptions: NDo not interrupt the
person speaking. All opinions are important. Waiting your turn to speak demonstrates respect for others and their ideas.

Use appropriate language:

Language must be respectful and appropriate for the setting. Avoid raising your voice, insulting, or making personal attacks that could offend others. The goal is to foster constructive dialogue, not confrontation.

5

Focus on arguments, not people:

Discussions should focus on the arguments, not the person presenting them. Avoid personalizing criticisms or making comments that attack colleagues instead of their ideas.

6

Keep an open mind: Participants should be

willing to reconsider their own points of view in light of the arguments presented by others. The Socratic method is a collective analytic process where everyone can learn and contribute to mutual understanding..

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Explication of the Socratic Method

In the participants' guide, which is attached to this document, a brief biography of Socrates and a simple explanation of the Socratic method are included. It is recommended that this part of the guide be read in turns by the participants, which will allow for a better understanding of the method and encourage discussion from the outset. By reading Socrates' story, participants will be able to ask questions, understand the purpose of Socratic dialogue, and learn how to apply it in the process of reflection and conflict resolution.
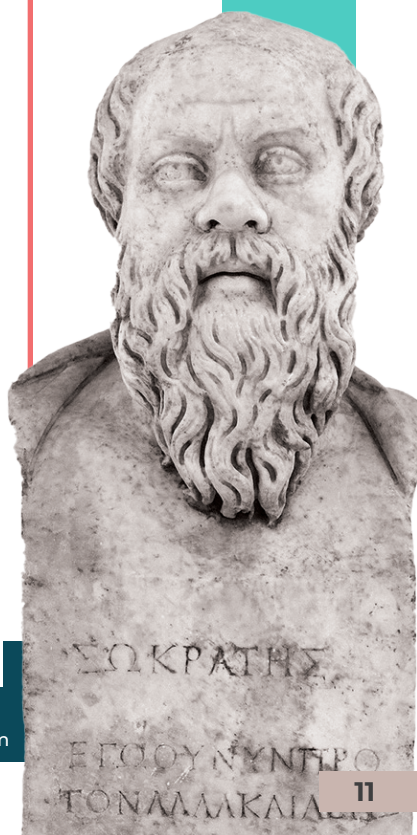
Implementation of the Adapted Socratic Method

1. Initial Question

After completing the preparatory activity and explaining the Socratic method, an initial statement should be chosen to spark debate, adapted to the context in which the method will be implemented. It is crucial that this statement be carefully selected to promote a rich and participatory discussion.

The statement should be incomplete, ambiguous, or lead to a false conclusion, known as a 'fallacy.' The purpose of this selection is to create a polarizing starting point, so that participants, through their interventions, are motivated to soften, clarify, or question the strength of the statement. This encourages participants to examine different perspectives and work towards consensus as the dialogue develops.

For example, a statement like: *"To achieve peace, one side must give in to the other's interests,"* could be used. In this case, the formulation invites participants to offer differing points of view, contrast with personal experiences, or find examples that challenge or modify the initial statement, thus promoting a dynamic and reflective discussion.

The statement may be proposed by the teacher, workshop leader, facilitator, or ideally, by one of the participants

## Other examples of provocative statements include:

- Intelligence is something innate and cannot be developed.

- Happiness is related to the amount of money a person has.

- Success is only possible if you have connections.

- Gender determines a person's abilities.

- Democracy is the only system of government that works.

- Formal education is the only way to achieve professional success.

- Forgiveness benefits the offender, not the victim.

- Traditions should not change because they define our identity.

- Revenge is a just response to an injustice.

- Hard work is the only factor that defines success.

- Emotions should not play a role in important decisions.

- Laws must be obeyed without question.

- Science is always right because its results are verifiable.

- Leaders are born, not made.

- Failure is a clear sign that someone is not capable enough.suficientemente capaz.

- People are poor because they want to be.

- Respect must be earned, not given freely.

- People who make serious mistakes do not deserve second chances.

- Neutrality is the best option in any conflict.

- Physical appearance reflects our values.

- Being a man means being strong.

- Natural resources are inexhaustible.

- Good people are obedient.

- People demand rights but avoid responsibilities.

- An unjust peace is better than a just war.

- If you want peace, prepare for war.

- If everyone does it, it must be right.

- Majorities are never wrong.

- If you avoid talking about the problem, it will eventually disappear on its own.

2. Opinions

Participants take turns expressing their opinions on the initial statement. These should be recorded concisely on a board or a visible screen for everyone. If these resources are not available, one or two participants can be assigned as secretaries, who will note down the opinions in a notebook or on a mobile device.

3. Validation and Refutation

Once all opinions have been expressed, the process of validation and refutation begins. Each participant, in turn, will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the previous opinions. It is essential to explain that all opinions have at least one weakness and one strength. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the language used must avoid hurting the feelings of others. Participants may be advised to use expressions such as:
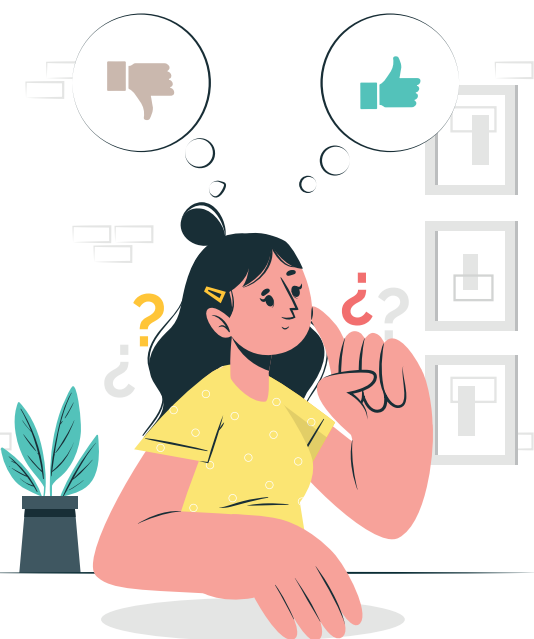
Unfortunately, I cannot agree with your opinion because...

I respectfully disagree with this stance because...

I find this idea problematic, because ...

I believe there are better alternatives, such as...

I understand what you are saying, but it seems to me that...

Reformulation

After validation and refutation, the group should reformulate the original statement, integrating the strengths of the different points of view. If consensus is not reached, steps **2 (Opinions), 3 (Validation and Refutation), and 4 (Reformulation)** are repeated. It is important to remind participants that it is not always possible to reach an immediate agreement and that more sessions may be needed to achieve it. It is also important to emphasize that the value of the exercise lies in critical reflection and the continuous process of dialogue, as the exchange of opinions allows us to move towards consensuses that facilitate peaceful coexistence by respecting and valuing our differences.

D. Variation

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The activity can be divided into several sessions, depending on what the teacher, workshop leader, or facilitator deems appropriate. To enrich the dialogue, participants can be assigned a reading or a video related to the topic, so that they come to the discussion with more context and well-formed opinions.

If the group does not achieve a complete reformulation of the initial statement in the first session, it can be postponed to the next session. During this time, participants can commit to researching more about the topic, which will allow them to refine their arguments and contribute more effectively in the next stage of the dialogue. It is recommended that the supplementary sessions do not exceed one hour.

Evaluation

E

The evaluation of the Socratic method application can be adapted to the needs and goals of the participants. Below are several evaluation options:

1. Reflective Writing:

Participants may write a brief reflection on the results of the Socratic dialogue. They can include an extended biography of Socrates, summaries of the most important Platonic dialogues, and define key concepts such as argumentation, argument, counterargument, fallacy, persuasion, active listening, assertiveness, and respect.

2. Group Evaluation:

Participants may conduct a group evaluation where, at the end of the activity, each person comments on which ideas changed or were strengthened through the dialogue. Additionally, the consensus-building process can be evaluated: Did we manage to arrive at a solution together? How did the process feel?

3. Action Plan:

After the dialogue, participants may create a collective action plan summarizing the solutions or consensuses reached and how to implement them in their particular context (community, work team, etc.). The plan will allow evaluating of how the Socratic method may lead to concrete actions.

4. Feedback Surveys:

Participants may complete an anonymous feedback survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the Socratic method in improving mutual understanding and conflict resolution. Questions may be used such as: Did you feel heard? Did your perspective change after the dialogue? How would you rate the quality of the debate? These can help measure the impact of the process.

F Guide for the participants

A PRACTICAL DIALOGUE **GUIDE** FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION BASED ON THE SOCRATIC METHOD
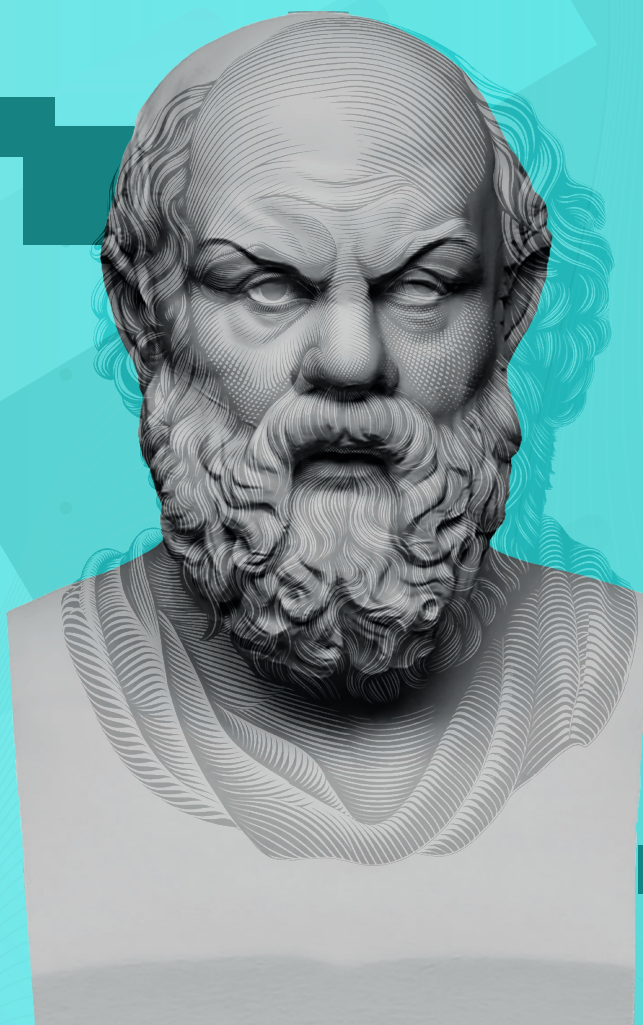
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Introduction

This guide presents an adaptation of the Socratic method for conflict resolution. Its primary goal is to raise awareness about the importance of constructive dialogue, critical analysis, and the search for consensus. The guide also aims to motivate people to create spaces for exchanging ideas where participants can challenge their own assumptions and those of others. The dialogical process seeks to build a collective understanding that respects the diversity of perspectives and avoids the imposition of opinions. Participants are expected not only to learn how to lead a dialogue but also to negotiate and reach consensus, essential skills for harmonious coexistence. This guide is designed for any group of people interested in facilitating dialogue, since it can be applied in various contexts:

IN THE COMMUNITY

It allows people to discuss local issues and seek joint solutions.

IN THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

It helps improve communication and resolve misunderstandings between family members or friends.

IN THE WORKPLACE

It facilitates conflict resolution among coworkers.

Who Was Socrates?

Socrates is one of the most important philosophers in the history of Western philosophy. He was born in Athens, Greece, in 469 B.C., almost 2,500 years ago. Although little is known about his childhood and youth, it is believed that his father was a sculptor and his mother a midwife. Socrates did not leave any written works, so most of what we know about him comes from the writings of his disciples, especially Plato.

Unlike many philosophers of his time, Socrates did not focus on studying nature or the universe but on moral and ethical issues. Socrates believed that knowledge and wisdom were the keys to living a good and virtuous life. He was known for his teaching style. Instead of giving direct answers to his interlocutors, he asked questions to make them reflect and arrive at their conclusions.

Socrates had many disciples and followers, but he also had enemies. His ideas and teachings challenged the realities of his time, so Socrates was sentenced to death for blasphemy and corrupting the youth of Athens. His accusers believed he was introducing new gods and leading the youth away from democracy. He was forced to drink a cup of hemlock, a poisonous drink that led to his death in 399 B.C. Despite these unjust accusations, Socrates' life and teachings have influenced many later philosophers and thinkers. His vision of ethics and the importance of knowledge and wisdom remain relevant today.
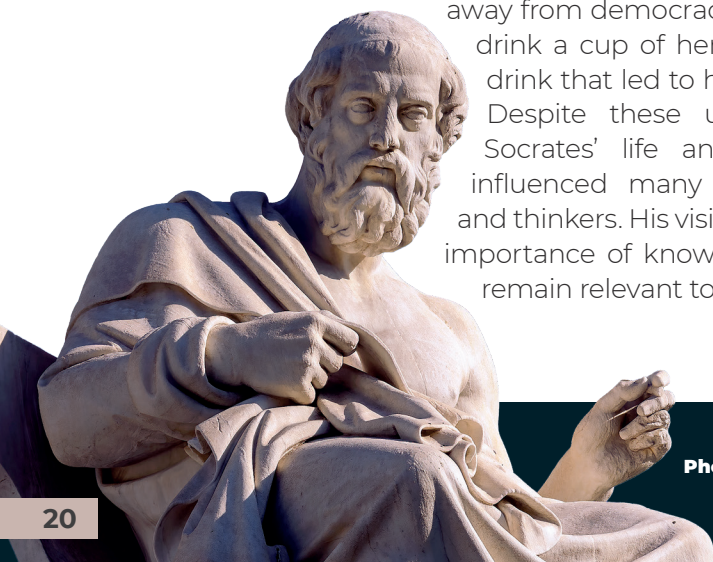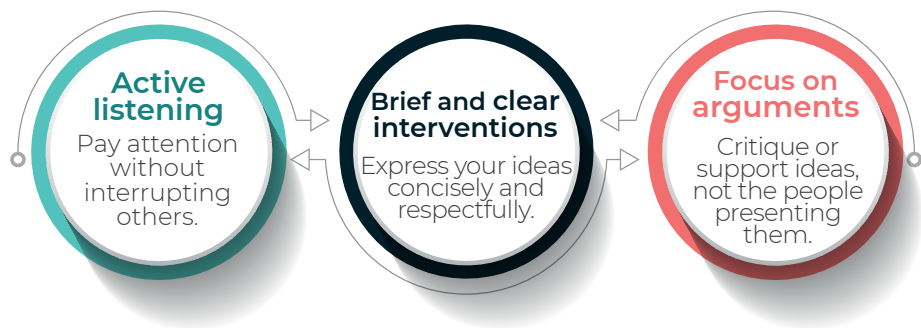
Photo by: worldhistory.org

What Is the Socratic Method?

The Socratic method is a process of dialogue and reasoning based on the confrontation of ideas through questions and answers. Instead of quickly reaching a conclusion, the goal is to delve deeper into the analysis of a topic through the exchange of different perspectives. This method encourages active listening, critical reflection, and respect for the opinions of others. Through this process, participants question their ideas and those of others, which allows consensus-building and arriving at solutions that integrate a diversity of opinions.

How can we apply the Socratic Method to Conflict Resolution?

Before beginning the discussion, it is important to prepare to listen without prejudice. Often, we disagree with the opinions of others. However, how can we be so sure that person is wrong? Have I ever taken the time to analyze their arguments? Are my emotions or my reasoning telling me that they are mistaken? The first step is to question our own assumptions and open ourselves to dialogue. The Socratic method is not about winning or losing an argument but about enriching mutual understanding. During the activity, everyone must respect the following rules:

Active listening
Pay attention without interrupting others.

Brief and clear interventions
Express your ideas concisely and respectfully.

Focus on arguments
Critique or support ideas, not the people presenting them.

With the help of the teacher, workshop leader, or facilitator we follow the steps below:

a.

Initial question: A statement is posed on a topic we want to analyze. For example, "To achieve peace, one side must give in to the interests of others."

b.

Opinions: Each participant briefly expresses their opinion on the statement and records it in a notebook, agenda, phone, or other available medium.

c.

Validation and refutation: We will now examine the strengths and weaknesses of the statements, always with the utmost respect.

d.

Reformulation: Using the strengths of the statements, we will try to build a new statement with which everyone agrees.

If no consensus is reached, we will repeat steps **b) Opinions, c) Validation and refutation, and d) Reformulation.**

Final Reflection

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It may be necessary to repeat these steps several times, even in multiple sessions, as some topics are challenging to address. However, dialogue will help us understand why it is so challenging and, at the same time, recognize the value of the opinions of others and the shortcomings of our own. We conclude by answering the following questions: How did you feel during the discussion process? How would you describe the process of trying to reach a consensus? Did you find it useful?