Socratic Questioning Techniques

Socrates is credited with a method of engaging people in dialogue which requires deep thought. This Socratic Method is basically asking a series of questions on a central issue or topic to engage others in thoughtful discussion. Teachers can help students develop critical thinking skills by learning this method of questioning for themselves and their students. The best way to use this method is in a one on one dialogue with another person. A teacher may also use this in a class or small group discussion format. A teacher could use these questions in planning their lessons. There are 6 main categories in which to frame questions. Teachers need to use these questions to internalize this method of dialogue. They also need to teach the students how to think for themselves by teaching them how to question.

Questions of Clarification:

Can you explain that….?
What do you mean by ….?
Can you give me an example of …?
How does that help…?
Does anyone have a question about….?
What is your main point?
Would this be an example of…?
How does….relate to …..?
Could you explain that further?
Could you put that another way?
Could you rephrase that please?
Is your basic point….or….?
Why do you say that?
What do you think is the main issue here?
Let me see if I understand you; do you mean….or…?
How does this relate to what we are talking about?
What is the nature of…?
What do we already know about this?
How does that help?
Can you summarize in your words what Richard meant?
Richard, is that what you meant?

Questions that probe assumptions:

What are you assuming?
What could we assume instead?
You seem to be assuming….Do I understand you correctly?
All of your reasoning depends on the idea that ….? Why have you based your reasoning on …. rather than….?
You seem to be assuming ….. How would you justify taking this for granted?
Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?
Why would someone make this assumption?
Do you agree or disagree with this assumption?
Can you verify or disprove your assumption?
What would happen if…?

Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence:

What would be an example of…?
Are these reasons adequate?
How do you know?
Why did you say that?
Why do you think that is true?
What led you to that belief?
Do you have any evidence for that?
How does that apply to this case?
What difference does that make?
What would change your mind?
What other information do we need?
What are your reasons for saying that?
Could you explain your reasons to us?
But is there good evidence to believe that?
Is there reason to doubt that evidence?
Who is in a position to know if that is so?
What would you say to someone who said…?
Can someone else give evidence to support that response?
By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
How could we find out whether that is true?
What other information do we need?
What is …analogous to?
What do you think causes…to happen?
Are these reasons good enough

Would it stand up in court?
How might it be refuted?
How can I be sure of what you are saying?
On what authority are you basing your argument?
Who really benefits from this?
Why is it better than….?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of …?
What would Bob say about this?
How can you look another way at this?
Can you give me an example of…?
What might change your mind about…?

Questions of Viewpoints or Perspectives:

You seem to be approaching this issue from …perspective.
Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
How would other group/types of people respond? Why? What would influence them?
How could you answer the objection that …would make?
What might someone who believed…think?
Can/did anyone see this another way?
What is a counter argument for …?
Another way of looking at this is….Does this seem reasonable?
Can you put it another way?
What if someone were to suggest that…?
What is the difference between those view/ideas and …?
Can you explain why it is necessary or beneficial, and who benefits?
What would someone who disagrees say?
What is an alternative?
How are Bob and Mary's ideas alike or different?

Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences:

What are you implying by that?
When you say…, are you implying…?
But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
What effect would that have?
Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
What is an alternative?
If …. and … are the case, then what else must also be true?

If we say that this is unethical, how about that?
What are the consequences of …?
Then what would happen if…?
What are the implications of….?
How does…effect….?
How does…fit with what we have learned before?
Why is ….important?
What generalization can you make?

Questions about the questions:

How can we find out?
Is this the same issue as …?
What does this question assume?
How would ….put the issue?
Would …put the question differently?
Why is this question important?
How cold someone settle this question?
Can we break this question down at all?
Is the question clear? Do we understand it?
Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?
Does this question ask us to evaluate something?
Do we all agree that this is the question?
To answer this question, what questions would we have to answer first?
I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting the main question.
What is the point of that question?
What does that mean?
How would what was said help us?
Why do you think I asked this question?
How does…apply to everyday life?

Here is a list of strategies that can help to extend student thinking:

Give students about 3 seconds of "wait time" to collect their thoughts.
Allow students to think individually, next with a partner, then with the class. (Think-Pair-Share)
Do not judge student answers. If there is a problem with the student's ideas or answers, the teacher can redirect so that the student does not feel humiliated or that his answers are not important.

Ask a student to summarize another student's ideas after a discussion.
Ask for a survey of who agrees with the author's point of view.
Ask students to explain their reasons by taking the opposite viewpoint.
Students are taught how to "unpack their thinking" by describing how they figured something out.
Call on students randomly.
Let students come up with their own questions.
Give students the opportunity to be the leader of a discussion after they have researched a topic.
Have students think of alternative solutions.
Give students a challenge.
Have student think out of the box and find ways to link ideas to come up with something novel.
Let students defend their ideas by giving explanations and/or justifying.
Teach students to reflect on past experiences or knowledge to come up with questions. "Have you ever thought about…"

Activities generated by questions:

Explaining
Defining
Giving Examples
Supporting
Inquiring
Forming arguments
Assumptions
Reason
Evidence
Counter example
Re-stating a viewpoint
Speculation
Alternative views
Counter arguments
Distinctions
Implications
Consistency
Consequences
Generalizing rules

Testing the truth
Questioning
Analyzing
Connecting
Summarizing
Coming to conclusions