

Civil Disobedience Socratic Seminar Questions

Page 1

- Evaluate HDT's opening paragraph. Ensure all understand what he is saying about government, and why he is currently protesting his government.
- What role has government played in America's success? Do you agree or disagree with HDT?
- How can Americans obtain a better government? Do you agree or disagree with HDT?
- Read the sections beginning with "after all" and ending with "subjects afterward." Ask students if we have studied this concept before. Guide students towards realizing HDT is describing the Tyranny of the Majority.
- Madison's answer to Majority Tyranny is to "extend the sphere." HDT's answer is conscience. Which solution is better and why?

Page 2

- How does HDT view soldiers and other servants of the state? Why does he have this view? Do you agree with him?

Page 3

- Why does HDT say that it is a disgrace to be associated with the American government?
- HDT compares the grievances that led to the American Revolution to the grievances in the America of his day. Which are worse? Why is no action taken concerning the grievances of his day?

Pages 3-4

- According to HDT, how much responsibility does the average citizen of the US bear for the Mexican War and for slavery? Do you agree or disagree with his reasoning?

Pages 5-6

- What should individuals do who disapprove of the "character and measures" of their government? What concrete action can one take to break the union between themselves and the state?
- HDT was in jail for one night because of his refusal to pay the poll tax. What would happen if one refused to pay taxes today? What would HDT say about this?

Page 6

- Read the highlighted paragraph together. Ensure students understand. See if anyone can make the connection to *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*. Highlights the shortfalls of democracy (majority tyranny).

- When, according to HDT, is it okay to break the law?

Page 8

- How can a principled minority enact change in society?
- Read the second highlighted portion on page 8. What is it harder for rich people to live virtuous lives? Do you agree or disagree with HDT? Can you make sense of his biblical allusion?
- Point out Confucius quote on page 9.

Pages 9-10

- What observations does HDT make while in jail?
- What conclusions does he draw about the state?

Pages 10-12

- Contains the prison account. Read and discuss if there is time.

Page 12

- What sorts of taxes does HDT support paying?
- Are there any contradictions here with what he wrote earlier?

Page 15

- Can we improve democracy? How?
- Are there any inconsistencies in this text that stuck out to you?

