

Debate

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Background

Debates are used to highlight the similarities and differences between various answers for the same problems. Not only do they push the participants to analyze all aspects of their argument, but they challenge them to communicate effectively and defend themselves when their argument is challenged.

The first step of hosting a successful debate is to choose a topic. Topics should be worded neutrally, be engaging and interesting for the debaters, and leave room for multi-faceted discussion. There should not be a clear answer to the question being asked, and both sides should be able to develop intelligent points for their side of the argument. While the topic should be relevant, it should not be anything that debaters would be uncomfortable speaking openly about.

Once the topic is chosen, the format of the debate must be decided. One potential option, described here, is to do a team debate. The group involved would split into two teams, either arbitrarily or by opinion. Each team would then be given nonbiased information about their topic and asked to discuss and form an opinion. First, each member on the “affirmative” side will briefly state their argument and their reasoning behind it. The “negative” side will then have the opportunity to question the affirmative side, either to clarify a point made or to lead into their side of the discussion. The members of the negative side will then argue their points, rebutting the affirmative side’s arguments as they go along. After the negative side has finished presenting, the affirmative side can ask clarification questions, or questions leading into their rebuttal. The affirmative side then offers a closing argument and rebuttal, followed by the same from the negative side. The winner should be the team that develops and communicates their argument most effectively, and counters the rebuttal from the opposing side most successfully.

Objective

Students should be able to:

- Construct an educated argument given reading material about a certain subject.
- Communicate the main points of their argument to both their teammates and in the debate itself.
- Effectively rebut an opposing argument

Materials

- Relevant reading material (one packet per student)
- Debate Handout

Safety Concerns

- None.

Vocabulary

- Rebuttal: to refute prior evidence, and to oppose by offering contrary information
- Team debate: composing arguments and opinions in a group, alternating who presents the information in the debate

Procedure

Time	Activity	Description	Supplies
5	1. Making Teams	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the topic statement. Some examples of potential topic statements include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Natural gas powered vehicles (or electric battery vehicles) should replace gasoline powered cars as the future of United States transportation sector. b. Developing solar and wind power should be the focus of America's future energy portfolio. c. Carbon capture and sequestration is necessary to decrease the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. d. The United States needs to maintain nuclear energy as a core energy provider. e. Individual actions don't make a big difference in regards to climate change. f. Eliminating coal usage is vital to sustain our climate. 2. Divide the students into two groups. The division can be arbitrary, or it can be based on the beginning opinions of the students. 	
25	2. Developing Arguments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Once the students are divided, give them resources about the topic to read before beginning to form arguments. 2. After about 10-15 minutes (or after the students are done reading), have the students talk about their thoughts on the article. 3. The students should be able to come to a consensus about the general points of the argument. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. While the students may add subtleties to their individual argument, they should all be in agreement about the major points. 	Relevant reading material (one packet per student), Debate Handout
30	3. The Debate!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The debate begins! One potential format for the team debate is: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Affirmative Construction: The members of the affirmative group each present in defense of their argument (5 minutes). 	

		 <p>b. Negative Cross-Examination: The negative group questions the affirmative group to clarify their points, bring attention to particular issues with the affirmative argument, and lead into their presentation (3 minutes).</p> <p>c. Negative Construction: The negative group presents on their major argument, and begins to offer their rebuttals for the affirmative group’s argument (7 minutes).</p> <p>d. Affirmative Cross-Examination: The affirmative group asks questions to the negative group, leading into their rebuttal (3 minutes).</p> <p>e. Affirmative Rebuttal: The affirmative group addresses the points brought up in the negative argument, ending with a closing statement.</p> <p>f. Negative Rebuttal: The negative group addresses points brought up in the affirmative argument, ending with a closing statement.</p> <p>2. A winner is declared!</p>	
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Additional Resources

Reputable

Meany, John. “On Topic Writing.” Claremont McKenna College. Web. 23 Jul 2013.
 <<http://www.middleschooldebate.com/topics/topicwriting.htm>>

John Meany’s page on picking a debate topic talks primarily about how to write a topic statement that is worded in a way to facilitate a good discussion.

Tomlinson, James. “Lincoln / Douglas Debate Format.” Bloomsburg University. Web. 24 Jul 2013. <http://facstaff.bloomu.edu/jtomlins/debate_formats.htm>

James Tomlinson’s page lists three step-by-step potential debate formats, color coded to represent when different arguments are offered.

Opinion / Newspaper

Debate Motions. “How to pick a debate topic.” Debate Motions. Web. 23 Jul 2013.
 <<http://www.debate-motions.info/how-to-debate/184-how-to-pick-a-debate-topic>>

The Debate motions page gives a few key points on how to pick interesting and noncontroversial debate topics, most interestingly, checking cnn.com for potential topics.

Debate Topics. “How to choose the debate topic that will engage your students.” Web. 23 Jul 2013. <<http://debate-topics.org/how-to-choose>>

The Debate Topics page educates on how to pick a debate topic such that the students learn as much as they can from both the debate and the selected topic. A list of potential topics is also offered.

International Debate Education Association. “Debate Formats.” International Debate Education Association. Web. 24 Jul 2013. <<http://idebate.org/about/debate/formats>>

The International Debate Education Association lists a number of different debate formats for online debates, team debates, and speech events.

TEFL. “How To Choose Debate Topics.” TEFL. Web. 24, Sep 2006.

<<http://www.tefllogue.com/resources/how-to-choose-debate-topics.html>>

The TEFL site offers a number of links to other sites that aid in picking a debate topic, as well as their own suggestions about choosing and framing the topic.

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Next Generation Science Standards Alignment

HS-ETS1-1: Analyze a major global challenge to specify qualitative and quantitative criteria for solutions that account for societal needs and wants.

HS-ETS1-3: Evaluate a solution to a complex real world problem based on prioritized criteria and trade-offs that account for a range of constraints, including cost, safety, reliability, and aesthetics as well as possible social, cultural, and environmental impacts.