

Teacher's Guide

INTRODUCTION

Debates encourage critical thinking skills through cooperative learning and help students in forming, presenting, and defending logical arguments. The topics in this publication allow for varying abilities of students, with questions suitable for students who are not college bound, as well as for honors students and college prep students. These debates may be used as a major research project or assignment for the course or semester.

The questions in this collection are structured in the common debate form with two clearly defensible positions; however, they are not structured as in a formal forensic debate class. The authors have purposely stayed away from formal debate jargon, such as, “resolved”, “first affirmative”, etc., as they tend to confuse and intimidate students.

PROCEDURE

1. Duplicate and distribute “Why Debates Are Beneficial to Students.” Explain the material. Students will generally perform at a higher level when they see the relevance of a project. This handout accomplishes this goal.
2. Duplicate and distribute “Debate Tips” and the “Debate Glossary” to each student. Use these handouts as a guide to improve performance and understand basic terminology.
3. Duplicate and distribute the “Debate Score Sheet – Pro and Con” and the “Debate Format”. Use these handouts to explain how the debates will be graded and what format will be used. The debate format sheet can be modified for different levels of students. For example, for some students, the teacher may wish to reduce the time requirements in round 1 to 4-5 minutes and in round 2 to 2 minutes. It is important for the teacher to explain the debate score sheet carefully to the students. If students know and understand the criteria used to grade their work, they can structure their debate to meet the expectations of the teacher. Teachers should feel free to modify the grading percentages as they wish to meet their individual classroom needs. The authors suggest 40% of the grade be derived from the annotated bibliography. This rewards students for conducting the necessary research for a successful debate and relieves the tension of some students who are apprehensive about making an oral presentation. During the debate, use the score sheet to grade the student presentation. After the debate, use the form to help students understand and evaluate their presentation.
4. Dates and times for the debates should be announced by the teacher at least two weeks in advance. Use the “Debate Sign-up Sheet” for this purpose.
5. Duplicate and distribute the “Sample Annotative Bibliography” and “Bibliography Style” sheets. These handouts will demonstrate the proper form for this assignment. The annotated bibliography is generally due the day of the debate. Assign each group their topic and allow time for research. Students will generally need two weeks of out of class time for research prior to the debate.

6. It is important to select competent students for the first debate. This establishes a pattern for subsequent debates.
7. There are often more questions and student slots than students in the class. The teacher may consider allowing students to sign up for a second debate as extra credit.
8. For debates to be successful, the proper classroom atmosphere must be maintained. Do not allow students to harass or distract the presenter. Students should take notes of the salient points on the "Debate Note Sheet." If you pit students who have a natural antagonism towards each other on opposite sides of an issue, you will often experience excellent debates exploring many aspects of the question. Competition is a great motivator.
9. The instructor may wish to pass out the "Debate Ballot" at the beginning of the class to gauge initial opinion on the issue. After the debate, take a second vote to see the change in views. This technique is part of the Debate Score Sheet. This is optional. If used, a student or teacher can tabulate the pre-vote during the break between Rounds 1 and 2. The post-debate ballots may be tabulated after the class.
10. If possible or desirable, videotape the debate. Student presentation, dress, and enthusiasm increase markedly.
11. The authors have provided questions at the varying ability levels of the students. The teacher should feel free to adapt, modify, or replace questions based on the specific requirements of their curriculum and students. There are more questions than could be used during a normal course. Instructors should pick and choose the questions that best fit their course. Approximately 7-10 debates a semester is normal.
12. These questions are intended as sample. The teacher should feel free to adapt or write entirely new questions based on the specifics of the syllabus. Current events are usually good debate topics.

Why Debates Are Beneficial to Students

“Debate may be viewed as an intellectual battle of supremacy between opposing sides of a question. The winner is the combatant who is best prepared and thinks the question through most judiciously.”

Robert Eugene Lewis

Debate teaches students:

1. library and research skills.
2. analytical and thinking skills.
3. to prove and support statements.
4. to evaluate evidence.
5. to demand proof of statements made by the opposing side.
6. to present ideas in a clear and effective manner.
7. to think under pressure.
8. to work with other students.
9. to make quick and accurate decisions.
10. to anticipate the arguments of the opposing side and how to counter them.