

DEBATE CLUB

Objectives

- Students will explore topics of interest to them via the forum of a debate.
- Students will create and articulate original talking points in support of their arguments.
- Students will understand the American democratic values of debate by considering opposing viewpoints.

Materials needed

- Two podiums (or music stands or similar) if available, but not necessary

Activity

To discuss topics of importance, a common forum people use is a debate. In the musical *1776*, we see the characters debate over whether the 13 American colonies should vote for Independence from England. In the show, the character of Stephen Hopkins from Delaware says, "There's not a topic that I can't debate..."

According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of a debate is "a formal discussion considering opposing arguments."

Today, we see debates happen between those who run public office. From your local city councilperson to the President of the United States. You may even see debates happen on your school campuses for those running for positions on the student body.

Let's practice this forum of having a debate.

- Set up two podiums.
- Offer topics for discussion and establish opposing arguments.
- Ask students to line up behind the argument they support.
- One by one, ask students to offer a talking point in support of their argument.
- As students hear points being made, they are encouraged to respond (via rebuttal).
- One talking point will be offered from each opposing side, back and forth, until all talking points have been made.
- Examples of debate topics:
 - Ice Cream vs. Cake
 - Pizza vs. Tacos
 - TikTok vs. Instagram
 - Gendered Bathrooms vs. All-Gender Bathrooms
 - Metal detectors on campus vs. No metal detectors on campus
 - Cell phone use in class vs. No cell phone use allowed in class

Reflection

- How did it feel to debate these topics?
- Were you swayed by any of the arguments made by the opposing side? How so?
- Are there any topics that should or should not be debated?

Closing

Having heard all the arguments, the next order of business would be to take a vote. As an American, one of the most powerful tools you have is your voice. You have the right to speak out in support or against anything you care about. One of the most effective ways to use that voice is to VOTE.

While watching *1776*, pay attention to all the different characters and all their different perspectives. How do these characters communicate their different points of view?

Lesson Extensions

Any topics that are debated upon can be further developed into formal proposals made by the students to the school administration for consideration.

Lesson Variations

The topics provided are just suggestions. Educators are encouraged to choose topics that directly apply to their students and will inspire lively debate.