

Debate Practical Joking

A plan for staging a debate for beginners, "debate do's," and basic assessment.

Why? Why? Why? Students are naturally inquisitive and sometimes quite spirited "know-it-alls." Why not capitalize on this somewhat annoying behavior? As teachers we need to work smarter, not harder. Using students' natural talent of arguing and challenging authority, we can channel student energy into a positive learning assignment. Debates offer that natural avenue for teachers to facilitate analytical thinking.

Classroom debates enable students to work cooperatively, brainstorm ideas, develop vocabulary and read to support an opinion. By conducting research, students are taking notes to summarize, to question, and to clarify information. Students are identifying the main idea, deleting less important information, collapsing, categorizing, and labeling information. Questioning allows students to explain and to explore additional facts for clarification purposes. These comprehension skills are essential for students to become competent readers and writers linking debates directly to the entire curriculum.

Debates allow students to become more proficient in speaking, researching, reading, and writing skills, and they promote reasoning as well as communication skills. Fact-filled and passionate debates provide the incentive for students of all academic and socioeconomic levels to become engaged and to participate in the debate process. In addition, debates, both formal and informal, are a vehicle for students to express their opinions assertively in a respectful manner on a relevant issue or topic.

Before the debate

A debate is a discussion in which participants articulate, justify, and clarify their positions on an issue. In this informal debate plan, rebuttals attempt to refute statements made by the opposing side.

Select the topic:

For use with the book *Pickle*, the topic will be as follows.

Is playing a practical joke on someone an acceptable way to have fun or is it mean and dangerous?

Take a stand:

Who is pro and who is con? Every debate has two sides, the affirmative side and the negative side. The affirmative side, “pro”, supports a proposition. The opposing or negative side, “con”, opposes the proposition. The teacher can divide the class into pros and cons, or students may choose their own stance.

Let the Research Begin:

Depending on the depth of your study, allow the time you need for brainstorming, discussion, and fact-gathering. Fact gathering should support the student’s point of view. Normally, three to five resources are recommended, but this may be a topic that lends itself more to opinion and examples. Students do need a structured framework to guide their research. A template for taking notes is shown below. You should teach students how to use the model before beginning brainstorming and discussion. It will make your their experience so much more pleasant!!

Opinion: I believe that playing practical jokes on people is fun and doesn't do them any harm.
Point #1:
Facts:
Point #2:
Facts:
Point #3:
Facts:

The con (against) side will fill out a similar model with the statement, “I believe that playing practical jokes on people is mean and could hurt someone and/or damage property.”

Staging the debate

Select a moderator:

The moderator directs the debate. For beginning debaters, the teacher might be the best moderator. The moderator formally introduces the debate topic and recognizes students to speak alternating between pro and con.

Debate Do's:

Students need expectations spelled out. It may be a good idea to develop a list of Debate Do's together as a class. The following items should be on the list. We suggest that these Debate Do's be posted in the classroom and referenced often:

- Be polite and courteous
- Listen attentively
- Be respectful and supportive of peers
- Avoid inappropriate noises
- Speak only when recognized by the moderator
- Allow others to express their opinions; do not monopolize the debate
- Use grammatically correct language
- Speak clearly, slowly, and loud enough to be heard by the audience
- Speak with passion and excitement

Opening and Closing Statements:

Students may volunteer to make opening and closing statements, or the teacher may appoint students. Setting the tone for the debate, the students should have a prepared speech (one to three minutes). The debate begins with an opening statement from the pro

side, followed by a statement from the con side. Opening statements should include each side's opinion with a brief overview of the supporting evidence.

The debate ends with closing statements from both sides. Again the pro side speaks first followed by the con side. The planned closing statements (one to three minutes) should restate the opinions with strong supporting evidence.

After the debate

When the debate is over, it's time to review and evaluate.

Reflections:

Students will express their reactions to the debate in a media of their choice. Suggestions include summarizing the debate in a paragraph or a poem, designing a cartoon, billboard, or a bumper sticker, or creating a graphic that represents their opinion.

Evaluation:

If you choose to evaluate for a grade, rather than participation, this is a possible rubric.

	3	2	1
Viewpoint	Viewpoints are clear and organized.	Most viewpoints are clear.	Viewpoints are unclear and disorganized.
Use of facts and examples	Arguments are supported with facts and examples.	Most arguments are supported with facts and examples.	Arguments lack factual support.
Relevance of supporting arguments	All supporting arguments are relevant.	Many, but not all, supporting arguments are relevant.	Few supporting arguments are relevant.

Strength of arguments	All arguments are strong and convincing.	Some arguments are convincing.	Arguments are not convincing.
Speaking voice	Voice can always be heard.	Voice is heard most of the time.	Voice is difficult to hear.
Preparation	Student is well prepared.	Student needs more preparation.	Student is unprepared to defend argument.

Total score: _____/18

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This content is an adaptation, aimed at a younger, less experienced audience in a less formal setting, of the lesson plan entitled *Debates in the middle school classroom* by Sharon Pearson and Pamela Myrick. It is licensed under the same Creative Commons License as the original work. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/> The original work can be found at the following website: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/artspersuade/636>.