

# FACEOFF DEBATE

## LESSON PLAN





**Teacher Overview:** In this activity, students will work in groups to first prepare and then hold a structured debate. Most students will take and defend one position and will attempt to persuade a panel of their peers.

**Goal:** Students will develop critical thinking and communication skills.

**Rationale:** This activity is intended to help students build the skills and attitudes needed for structured debate. These skills include listening respectfully to others, responding to opposing arguments, and considering the persuasiveness of various arguments.

## Standards Addressed

### CC3 (College, Career, and Civic Life) Framework

**D2.Civ.7.9-12.** Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others. (Fosters Constructive Climate)

**D4.1.9-12.** Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses. (Content Mastery)

**D4.2.9-12.** Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical). (Drawing Conclusions)

**D4.4.9-12.** Critique the use of claims and evidence in arguments for credibility. (Perspective Taking)

**D4.5.9-12.** Critique the use of the reasoning, sequencing, and supporting details of explanations. (Innovative Thinking and Civic Communication)

### Common Core State Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D.** Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. (Curiosity and Perspective Taking)

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3.** Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used. (Perspective Taking)

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (Drawing Conclusions)

# FACEOFF DEBATE

**Goal:** Students will develop critical thinking and communication skills.

**Objectives:** Students will:

- Take and defend a position
- Respond to arguments made by peers
- Evaluate the persuasiveness of arguments

**Materials:** *Controversial Issues in the News* issue discussion, Attachment 1, and copies and Attachment 2 for students serving as debate judges.

**Procedures:**

## Introduction (2 minutes)

1. Explain to students that they will be debating the central question from the policy discussion. They will need to work with other students to identify the strongest arguments to support their position, and to decide how to make those arguments. Additionally, some students will serve as a panel of judges.

## Divide Students into Debate and Assessment Groups (2 minutes)

1. Ask for a show of hands, or have students move to different parts of the room, to determine who, based on their own views and what they have read, currently leans toward the “yes” or “no” positions; students can also be undecided.
2. As practical, use the responses as the basis for forming three groups.
3. Explain that the class will hold a debate shortly and needs three to five students who do not have strongly held positions, or can be impartial, to serve as judges. You will need an odd number. With class sizes of 25 or larger, use five; with classes under 25 students, use three.
4. In order to have a good debate that will allow for real practice, the “yes” and “no” groups do not have to be exactly equal, but you may have to ask for volunteers to ensure that the two debating groups are roughly equal.

## Teams and Assessment Panel Prepare for Debate (10 minutes)

1. Once groups have been established, appoint facilitators in each group and alert students that they have 10 minutes to prepare debate. The “yes” and “no” groups will work on persuasive arguments for their respective positions and develop talking points for their position. Before students begin to prepare, tell them to be strategic about the order in which people speak. More confident speakers should speak earlier, but all students will speak during the debate; they will also want to have strong opening and closing speakers.
2. Prepare the judges:
  - As debate teams prepare, ask the judges to select one of their group to serve as a timekeeper for the debate and one to serve as debate moderator, who will explain the debate procedures to the debaters and moderate the debate. Provide the panel with a copy of “Debate Procedures” from Attachment 1.
  - Explain to the panel that they will be determining which side “wins” the debate, but they will also be responsible for explaining what they thought were the three strongest arguments made by each side and why they thought those arguments were persuasive.



- If time permits and debate groups are on task, give extra attention to the panel by posing some qualities of persuasive argument for them to consider: good information; evidence to support arguments; logical reasoning; relevant and meaningful examples that illustrate a concern; etc.
  - Ask the panel to look over the procedures and make sure they understand them and their role in the debate.
3. Guide the debate seating arrangements: As time for preparation comes to a close, position the two teams to be seated in lines facing each other with the judges at one end. Students should sit in order of who will be speaking in the debate groups—those who will speak first should be closest to the judges and the speakers making the closing arguments should be seated farthest from the judges.
  4. Invite the moderator to inform the teams of the debate procedures (Attachment 1).

### **Debate Ensues (25 minutes)**

1. Monitor the debate. Ideally, all students should get a chance to speak once. Allow as many rounds as possible without impinging on the remaining steps.
2. At the end of debate rounds, call time and invite each side to make its closing statement (the “no” side should be given the choice of whether they want to go last). If desired, you can allow each side a few minutes to confer before you begin closing statements.
3. Following closing remarks, give the panel a few minutes to confer and decide three questions: Which side made the most persuasive case overall? What were the three most persuasive arguments made by the “yes” side? What were the three most persuasive arguments made by the “no” side?
4. While the panel confers, ask the two teams to discuss which arguments on the opposing side they thought were most effective.
5. Take the panel’s decision and allow time for cheering.

### **Reflection (10 minutes)**

1. Have students either work together in small groups, or lead a whole-group discussion on the following questions:
  - Which arguments were the most persuasive?
  - Were there any arguments that you thought were not represented in the debate?
  - How could the side that lost the debate have made a stronger case?

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

### **DEBATE PROCEDURES**

- The debate will go in rounds.
- In each round, one student at a time will be given the floor to make the case for his or her side. No one may interrupt any debater who has the floor; debaters may not use their time to pose questions to the opposing side.
- In round one, each side will have one minute to make an opening statement presented by one student. Opening statements will begin with the “yes” side. Opening statements may include an overview of the arguments to come and/or an explanation of the strongest argument on that side.
- Round two will proceed with 30-second arguments from one student from each side.
- For each subsequent round, each side will have 30 seconds to either present an argument or make a rebuttal to a previous point. No student on a side may speak a second time before every student on that side has spoken once.
- At the beginning of each round following the opening statements, any judge may exercise the option to pose a question which each side will respond to.
- When final time is called (by the teacher), each side will have one minute to give a closing statement. (PRIOR to debate, each team will choose which student will give the closing argument.) Closing statements should summarize the strongest points from that side’s arguments and rebuttals.
- When closing statements are concluded, the judges will decide which team overall made the most persuasive case.

## ATTACHMENT 2

### GUIDE FOR JUDGES

As you are listening to the arguments presented by the debate sides, think about who is the most persuasive, and which side overall is the most persuasive. Remember, being the most persuasive does not mean being the funniest or most outrageous; it means presenting the best argument. A few things that might make an argument persuasive:

- Use of compelling facts or statistics
- Use of a personal story or anecdote
- Appeal to emotion or a call to action

Use the table below to help you take notes:

Debater	Argument Presented	Persuasive? Why or why not?

Overall, which side do you think was the most persuasive? Why?