

Debate – teacher’s notes

Objective: by the end of this lesson, students will have learned how to participate in a debate about a controversial topic.

Rationale: participating in a debate supports critical thinking skills by encouraging students to evaluate arguments and subsequently get their own points across.

Time: 80 minutes

Procedure:

1. Task set up

Before class, come up with a list of three or four controversial topics that are relevant to your students. A few examples: a complete ban on smoking, reducing the voting age, getting rid of corporate tax, etc.

2. Task introduction: 15 minutes

Tell students they are going to participate in a debate about a controversial topic. Write the three or four topics you came up with before class and ask students to come up with other topics to add to the list. Have students discuss with a partner which topics are most interesting/relevant to them, then have the class as a whole vote on which topic to choose for the debate.

Next, have students think about which stakeholders are impacted by the topic, e.g. taxpayers, restaurant owners, the government, large companies, students, etc. Would these stakeholders be for or against the topic? Now have students decide if they want to be on the for or against side. Try to make sure that the sides are more or less equal in size.

Ask one student to be the facilitator of the debate. This person will be responsible for the smooth running of the debate and will make sure that both teams have equal speaking time.

3. Roles: 30 minutes

Refer to the list of roles on the worksheet. Have students choose which role they would like to assume. There can be more than one student for each role (it might make sense to have several researchers and/or English experts, for example).

Now have students prepare for their debate. Make sure that you help out the coordinators if needed; they should be the ones to organise and direct their groups.

During the preparation stage, the facilitator for the debate should go back and forth between both groups to get an idea of what arguments will come up. They should prepare a structure for the debate (opening statements, arguments, closing statements). Make sure that the facilitator knows that they have the responsibility for ensuring that the debate lasts for 20 minutes and that both teams have equal talking time.

4. Debate: 20 minutes

Have the for team and the against team sit facing each other with the facilitator in a position where they can be seen by the whole class. Have the facilitator explain the structure of the debate and get the debate started.

While the debate is going on, note down on the flip chart language use that you would like to highlight later.

5. Feedback: 5 minutes

Have the facilitator quickly summarise the arguments that arose during the debate. Show the class the language that you wrote on the flip chart and have them identify good uses of the language as well as areas which could be improved.

6. Student reflection: 10 minutes

Point out the reflection task at the bottom of the worksheet. Have students think of how well they argued, which language they used and if they have changed their opinion about the topic.

