

A Respectful Debate

This project is designed to help students utilize respectful words and body language to engage in a healthy debate on a relevant topic. Students will gain skills in public speaking, research, idea formation, respectful communication, and appropriate body language.

Respect Sub-Concept(s)

Self-care, Kindness

Project Timeframe

25-30 minutes

Required Materials

- ❑ Debate Topics: Many can be found here:
<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/topics/debate/>
- ❑ Debate Strategies: Some examples include Fish Bowl, Four Corners, and Tag Team. Other debate descriptions and ground rules can be found at Education World:
http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml
- ❑ Students may benefit from watching a sample debate. Search YouTube (or TeacherTube) for sample classroom debate or show the following sample debate as an introduction: Almond Elementary - Fifth Grade Debate (6:28 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bsXj2tyPpQ>

This lesson builds on previous lessons in this unit and takes a minimum of two class periods; one to prepare and one to do the debate. Decide ahead of time what type of debate you would like to do. See Resources for descriptions of different types of debates.

Project Details:

Day 1 (30 minutes)

- First, introduce students to the concept of a debate, ensuring that students know this is not simply an argument; rather, it is an opportunity to discuss many sides of one particular issue in a formal setting. If appropriate (if it coordinates with a social studies lesson or if it is an election year), present some examples of political debates the students might be familiar with. You might even show clips of a debate so students can identify body language and where debaters are showing respect or disrespect to one another.
- Divide the class into two teams, assigning one team to debate for the topic and one team to debate against it. Explain to students that if they are assigned to debate one side of the topic that they don't agree with, they can still debate that side. It is part of the learning process. Have students discuss and develop the rules for the debate. Suggest the following rules if they are not mentioned: no personal insults, no put downs, no emotional appeals (such as "If you don't agree with me, I'm going to cry!"), everyone needs to do their fair share of research, everyone needs to try their best, and students need to be kind even if they disagree.
- Have students determine a topic they would like to debate. Students could focus on something like the following (or a topic you are already studying):
 - Should Students be giving homework?
(<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/do-kids-need-homework-g5-8-plus/>)
 - Should students wear uniforms?
(<http://school-uniforms.procon.org>)
 - Should soda pop be sold in cafeterias?
(<http://elliewithers.weebly.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-drinking-soda-pop.html>)

- Should cyclists be required to wear helmets?
(<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/cyclesafety/article3495439.ece>)
- Should chewing gum be banned at school?
(<http://www.chewinggumfacts.com/chewing-gum-facts/chewing-gum-in-school/>)
- Should kids get an allowance?
(<http://www.raisesmartkid.com/6-to-10-yearsold/5-articles/51-allowance-for-kids-the-pros-cons-and-some-useful-tips>)
- Should kids be allowed to eat junk food?
(<http://www.today.com/parents/why-you-should-let-your-kids-eat-some-junk-food-1D79851272>)
- If you feel your students are ready, you could have them debate a local, state, or national public policy issue.

To further emphasize the democratic process, conduct a class vote to determine which issue will be debated; then flip a coin to determine which group will debate which side.

Day 2 (30 minutes)

Present each group with an opportunity to “research” their side. If computer/Internet access is not available to the students, print out at least one article for each side of the argument to distribute to the groups. The sites above will have some useful information. The majority of the arguments will likely be personal opinions, but if students can insert some factual or statistical information as well, they should.

Day 3 (20 minutes)

Each group should select two designated speakers; these students will present the initial position statement in 3-5 minutes as well as offer the rebuttals. Each group should have one initial presenter and one student for rebuttal.

Day 4 (30 minutes)

- Set up the classroom for the debate. Each team should sit together on their respective side of the classroom or as appropriate for your debate style. Invite other teachers or parents to help judge and moderate the debate.
- A timekeeper will keep track of the time of the speeches.
- Ask the student who will speak first to give a three-minute opening speech supporting the topic. Ask the opposing team to give a three-minute rebuttal speech opposing the topic.
- Then give other students from the team a chance to speak, following the speaking and rebuttal format. Halfway through the debate, provide a break so students can work on their arguments within their teams.
- After everyone is finished, the moderators and judges may ask the students questions and decide on the winning team.

Day 5: Wrap Up (5-10 mins)

To gauge understanding of the material, choose from either the evaluation or reflection questions as discussion, writing, or journal prompts. Consider providing additional time for deeper evaluation and reflection as needed.

Evaluation Questions

- What are the important elements of a debate?
- What do respect and integrity have to do with a debate?
- Do we use facts or opinions in debates? Why?

Reflection Questions

- Was it difficult or easy for you to debate an issue?
- Did you feel respected during the debate?
- Which parts of learning to debate do you think you can use in your regular life?

Proposed Lesson Outcomes

Students will:

- Contribute to a large group project.
- Debate an issue using respectful communication skills.
- Incorporate key elements from the Respect Unit related to kindness, listening, communication, and teamwork.

Optional Extension Discussion Activity

To extend this activity, have students discuss what it means to have freedom of speech. Ask the following questions:

- Does freedom of speech mean that people can always say whatever they want?
- Can stating facts or opinions infringe on someone else's rights and freedoms?
- What would it feel like if someone told you that you didn't have a right to speak?
- What does it mean to state facts and opinions fairly in a society and how does that enrich a community?



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<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

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