

Classroom Activities

While formal debating is an important and useful tool it may not be the first thing students do to develop their communications skills.

Many classroom activities help develop the basic skills utilised in debate. Classroom discussion develops the students thinking on issues and how to create a convincing argument. Public speaking and presentations also develop the ability of a student to structure an argument, gain confidence and improve speaking style.

In this Chapter we have a few activities you might like to try in the classroom.

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Activity – The Hat Debate

Activity - The balloon debate

Activity - The same story?

Activity - Trigger words

Activity - I say... You say...

Activity - Your point of view?

Activity - Just a minute

Activity - Complete the sentence

Activity - Community, national and global case-studies

Activity - In the news

Activity – Argument or Example?

Activity - Debate Checklist

Activity - The hat debate.



Learning Objectives

1. To encourage an expression of views and debate on various issues

Resources

2. You will need: enough copies of newspapers for each small group of three or four people to have one copy of one paper. Choose from the broadsheet papers (Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Times, Independent, Financial Times) and the tabloid papers.

Activity

- Use the papers to get lots of suggestions of different topics that can be argued for and against.
- Try and word them as motions in a debate 'This House supports...' ,This House would...'
- Put the motions into a hat.
- Then ask for two volunteers who will take part in the first debate.
- Pull a motion out of the hat for them and flip a coin to allocate sides.

They then have ten minutes to prepare, say, a four-minute speech. Just before they start debating, ask for another two volunteers and do the same thing; these two can prepare while the first two are debating. You can repeat this for as long as you like.

- The two students should then engage in a brief debate using the following format:

1st speaker in favour of the motion speaks for 1 minute

The opposition speaker asks questions of the 1st speaker for 1 minute

The opposition speaker then has 1 minute to deliver their speech

The 1st speaker then has 1 minute to question the opposition speaker

The rest of the class can then submit questions and comments to both speakers for 5 minutes

Class Discussion

It is important to draw out the fact that issues have two sides. You can ask the class why one side may be more convincing than another. Try to draw out that facts rather than assumptions or prejudice are more convincing to an audience. Also, make it clear that although debate is a way to test the truth of issues, this does not mean that students should go away after a debate thinking they know it all and are right, but that they should use the skills of debate to look at issues in the media and elsewhere.

It is also worth getting students to debate from a side they do not necessarily agree with. This highlights the benefit of realising that many issues have two sides, often with strong arguments on each side.

Activity - The balloon debate

Learning Objectives

3. To encourage an expression of views and debate on various issues

Activity

- Pick about five or six people each of whom chooses a historical or famous person to impersonate.
- Ask them to imagine that they are together in a hot air balloon that is rapidly sinking.
- One of them must be thrown overboard in order to save the others, but who will it be?
- Each participant must make a speech saying why they should be allowed to stay in the balloon. The audience votes, and the losers are disqualified from the debate.

Class Discussion

You can ask the class why one side may be more convincing than another. How often are we judged on our ability to communicate? At home, in schools, at work. Is communication important in less extreme circumstances? Try to draw out that facts rather than assumptions or prejudice are more convincing to an audience. Also, make it clear that debate is a way to test the truth of issues.

Activity - The same story?



Learning Objectives

4. An appreciation of the different perspectives found in different newspapers.

Resources

5. You will need: enough copies of that day's newspapers for each small group of three or four people to have one copy of one paper. If there are only two or three groups, choose from the broadsheet papers (Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Times, Independent, Financial Times) but if there are more groups include tabloid papers too.

Activity

- Ask each group to find one story/issue/country that is covered by all the papers.
- Ask each group to compare the treatment of their selected item in the different papers, looking especially at the source of information and pictures, and the relative emphasis in each paper.
- Each group must then write down their thoughts about the story based on the information provided.

Class Discussion

- What was different about the language used to describe the story/issue/country?
- What does this reveal about the point of view of the author?
- How do the pictures vary?
- Do they provide an emphasis to the viewpoint given in the text?

Activity - Trigger words

Learning Objectives

6. An appreciation of how words are chosen to create impressions.

Resources

7. You will need: enough copies of newspapers for each small group of three or four people to have one copy of one paper. Choose from the broadsheet papers (Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Times, Independent, Financial Times) and the tabloid papers.

Activity

- Ask each group to choose three news stories and to highlight the key words in them, including headlines and picture captions.
- Ask them to list these words on a separate piece of paper.
- Ask them to look at these 'trigger words' together, what impressions do they feel that they create or emphasise?
- Is the tone of the paper consistent between the three stories?
- Do headline, picture, caption and text fit comfortably together?

Class Discussion

Group feedback and discussion: Bring the groups together to discuss their findings.

Activity - I say... You say...

Learning Objectives

8. To encourage an expression of views on contemporary issues
9. To listen to others opinions

Activity

- Ask the students get together in pairs. One is **A**, the other **B**.
- Tell them you are going to give them a topic and that the designated person has two minutes to talk about/respond to the topic. **A** can start first.
- Topics will change every two minutes and only one partner may speak at a time.
 10. Crime in our community
 11. Gangs in our community
 12. Homelessness in our community
 13. Unemployment in our community
- You should continue until each person has been able to talk about three or four topics. (You can choose from the topics above, those listed here, or choose your own: AIDS, child abuse, dropouts, drugs, hunger, illiteracy, senior citizens, race relations, recycling, schools, teenage pregnancy, violence).

Class Discussion

Bring the class together and encourage the students to repeat their opinions so that the whole class can take part in discussion.

Activity - Your point of view?



Starting from the cue cards, individual issues can be explored and the relative merits of a particular action developed.

Learning Objectives

14. To encourage discussion on contemporary issues in society.
15. To allow students the opportunity for their ideas and opinions to be heard.
16. To get to know each other in the group.

Resources

17. Produce around 15 Situation Cards with statements or questions that will inspire a reaction from students.

Activity

- Divide the class into groups of four or five.
- Give each group some of the situation cards in a pile, face down.
- In their groups the students select one card at a time from the pack, and in turn give their own personal responses to each phrase or question.
- Allow the students to discuss the issues within their groups.

(Alternatively, give the students each one card and ask them to write a response to the statement).

Class Discussion

Have a class discussion to debate the issues that have been raised through the use of the cards.

Extension

Ask the students to make up their own statements based on stereotypes that either they have experienced first hand or witnessed. If the students feel comfortable, ask them to share the statements and experiences with the class.

Activity - Just a minute

Learning Objectives

18. To encourage students to think about the words they use
19. To encourage students to listen
20. To discuss issues of importance to students

Resources

21. Stopwatch and bell or whistle

Activity

- As a class decide on a topic that students would be prepared to speak on for 1 minute without repeating words (except the topic), hesitating or going off the point
- Explain that when a topic is decided and the first speaker begins the stopwatch will start. If that person hesitates, repeats words or talks about something unrelated to the topic then they can be challenged. To challenge you should raise your hand and the speaker must stop as will the stopwatch. The person who raised their hand will be asked to explain why they have done so. If the challenge is agreed they then will take over from the speaker and the stopwatch will start again. The student speaking when one minute is reached will receive a point or prize.

Activity - Complete the sentence



Learning Objectives

22. To encourage an expression of views and debate on various issues

Resources

23. Black board/Flip chart with a series of part statements with plenty of space between each one

Activity

- Write each of the following part statements on a flip chart or black board. *(The part sentences listed here are intended as a guide. It is possible to create your own, possibly tailored to a specific group).*

Part sentences

24. The cause of hunger in the world today is...
 25. People are homeless because...
 26. Because there are so many people in the world it means...
 27. Poverty exists when...
 28. Young people commit crimes because...
 29. Aid to Third World countries means...
 30. Young people are often powerless because...
 31. Most women in the UK do more health work than men because...
 32. People leave the UK to settle in other countries because...
 33. Although young British Black people tend to do well in the education system...
- Read out each statement in turn and ask the group to fill in the remainder of the sentence. *(Stress that there are no right or wrong answers: young people's thoughts and impressions are what count).*

As it is an ice-breaker activity, you may need to suggest responses and provoke replies. For example:

The cause of hunger in the world today is

Drought?

War?

Poverty?

Activity - Community, national and global case-studies



Learning Objectives

34. To explore contemporary issues and identify rights and responsibilities through short case studies.

Resources

Case Studies - each case study should have the following characteristics. It should:

35. be identifiable as featuring one or more of the community: local, national and global dimensions
36. be topical
37. highlight issues of human rights
38. examine the role and responsibility of government in relation to applying human rights principles to the issue identified
39. offer opportunities, however small-scale, for pupils to engage in meaningful action
40. Use resources e.g. newspaper cuttings, pamphlets providing different perspectives

Case Study Structure

Each Case Study should include:

1. A title
2. A statement explaining the issue and what effect it has locally, nationally and internationally.
3. What are the key questions raised?
4. How can these problems be tackled by Government(s)?
5. What have I learnt from this activity?

Activity

Each group to be given a case study to explore and reflect on the issues of rights and responsibilities contained in the study.

Each school's circumstances in social, civic and political education is likely to vary. Therefore, it is not desirable that individual classes cover a set number of case-studies, nor that their content is prescribed in detail.

Examples of the rights and issues that might be explored:

The right to education

Manufacturing training shoes or footballs
Third World/Child exploitation
Young people and part-time employment

The right to security of person

Gun laws in the USA
Necessary force to protect property and the individual

The right to privacy

Personalities and the media
Victims and the media

The freedom to express identity

Identity and language/culture
Ethnic minorities nationally

Freedom of information

The public and the BSE crisis

The public and GM Foods

Freedom of movement

Refugees

Security and access in schools

Immigration

European Union

Activity - In the news

Learning Objectives

41. To explore different viewpoints
42. To examine the motivations that drive the opinions

Resources

43. A news item of topical interest to young people and which has some question of morality or social justice associated with it.
44. Cuttings from as many newspapers and magazines as possible on this topic. Or record a short radio or TV news bulletin to hear the issue put succinctly. It is especially good if different newspapers have contrasting views.

Activity

- Spread out the cuttings, read them out and play the recording.
- Help the group to understand the central points of what has happened.
- Then, in whatever way you think suits your group, explore all sides of the issues.

This might involve taking on the role of one of the characters or interest groups, splitting into small groups to check out the story and then coming back into a big role-playing discussion. The trick is to make sure that all sides get a good hearing - and the group doesn't just quickly make a decision and say that's that. For example, good topics recently would have been refugees, allegations of political corruption where confidential information is used for private gain, the Dome, drug taking by athletes, or the use of landmines in wars.

- Get as many of the group as possible to express their opinion. Some of the group might have very strong opinions once they understand the events: for example, it was wrong to spend money on big building projects like the Dome or giving money to sport that does not directly help the poorest people.
- Try to go beyond these initial judgements (though they might be confirmed in them later). And try to see why people acted as they did.
- What motivates people?
- It is easy to condemn, but what would you do if you were desperate to win a medal or if you would benefit personally?

Activity – Argument or Example?



Below is a list of arguments and examples (fact). Indicate which ones you think are arguments by placing a tick next to the statement and a cross next to those you think are examples or facts.

The majority of people who go to University get better paid jobs

University is less useful than practical experience in finding a job

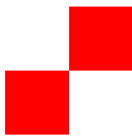
Universities bring people together from different backgrounds
and therefore helps to unify society

40% of 18 year olds go to University

In our modern world we need to make sure more of our young
people gain the skills available at University

The amount of graduates is growing much faster than the
jobs available for them

Activity - Debate Checklist



Good Things	Bad things
Teamwork.	Reading from a prepared script
Offer points of information. Accept points of information, but not too many!	Offer no points of information. Accept none at all, or every one that's offered
Speak for the full time allowed	If you speak significantly under or over the time allowed
Be aware of your position in the debate	Incomprehensible delivery
Pick up contradictions in your opponents' arguments	Ignore your partner and opposition team completely
Use strong arguments	Contradictions with a previous speaker or yourself
Back up your arguments with relevant examples	Use of ludicrously untrue 'facts'