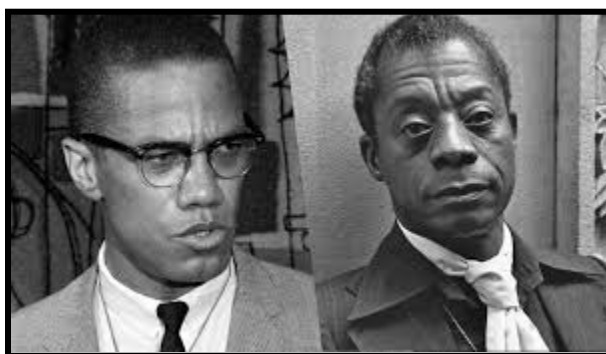


## Respectful Debate - [Anchor lesson on Racial Inequality](#)



### RESPECTFUL DEBATE: THE PATH TO RACIAL EQUALITY IN AMERICA



Malcolm X and James Baldwin Debate the Road to Equality in America

[Source: Watch the Yard Website 2019.](#)

*The path to racial equality in America can be achieved by Blacks separating from Whites.*

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**Rationale:** As students study historical developments, they will encounter debates that ensued over change. In this lesson, students will consider opposing perspectives held by two civil rights leaders in the 1960s about the path to racial equality in America. Students will engage in a respectful debate, listen to both sides of the argument to regulate their emotions, build collective understanding and historical empathy for the civil rights leaders. Such skills are necessary for students to practice to support their efficacy in participating in and leading respectful debates for healthy civil discourse.

**Objective(s):** Students will debate the arguments made by two civil rights leaders on how racial equality in America can be achieved by listening to, summarizing, and reflecting on the key points of the argument to build their perspective-taking skills.

**Target Grade Levels:** 9-12

### **Social Studies & ELA Standards:**

- **NJSLS-SS. 6.1.12.History CC.13.a:** Compare and contrast the leadership and ideology of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X during the Civil Rights Movement, and evaluate their legacies.
- **NJSLSA.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.
- **NJSLSA.W.11-12.1.** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

### **Focal SEL Skill:** Social Awareness

- Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others.

### **Materials & Resources**

- Notebook
- Pencil/Pen
- A computer connected to a projector for the teacher
- Chromebooks for students (optional)
- Copies of the background source: A Blog Post on the June 1963 Debate between Malcolm X and James Baldwin (included at the end of the lesson)
- Play audio recording [YouTube Audio Recording of Debate](#)

**Timing:** Two, forty-five-minute lessons

### **Lesson Procedure:**

#### **Part I: Introduction & Preparation (40 minutes):**

##### **1. Do Now/Introductory Activity**

As students get settled into class tell students that ***“today we are going to engage in a respectful debate about the path to racial equality in America by learning the views from both sides of an actual debate that took place between two activists during the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s”***. To prime their thinking after they settle in have them respond in writing to the statement below as a focusing/do now activity.

*“ The path to racial equality in America can be achieved by Blacks separating from Whites.”*

2. Arrange Student Groups (to be done in advance)

Divide the class into two groups, one group will assume the “pro” side and the other half will assume the “con” side. Tell the students that “ ***Today we will engage in an activity called Respectful Debate to practice the skill of perspective-taking. This is a skill that you will need to be an effective and involved citizen in your school and community as well as a global citizen. It involves debating not just one side of the debate you agree with but also taking the side of a debate that you don’t agree with***”. Inform the class that “***taking the position of a side you disagree with is the essence of Respectful Debate and this part of the lesson will help you build mutual understanding on the topic***”.

3. Prepare for the Respectful Debate

Distribute materials (optional in advance): Pass out the background information and have students read it to gain a general overview of the debate. Tell the students that “***You are going to meet two civil rights leaders, James Baldwin and Malcolm X, who met on television for a debate on the path to racial equality in America in June of 1963***”. You may have students underline/highlight the main points that informed James Baldwin and Malcolm X’s views on the debate to get students thinking about their perspectives on racial equality.

Next play approximately 12-15 minutes of the audio recording of the Malcolm X and James Baldwin debate, where they express their views on the path to racial equality. Listen to this in advance so you can inform the students which voice is Baldwin’s and which voice is Malcolm X’s. Impress upon the students to listen carefully with their full attention as they present ideas in detail with historical background knowledge. Feel free to assign listening to the debate as homework to help students familiarize themselves with the debate. They can even take notes on the key points made by each of the debaters for homework.

**Generate ideas:** Both sides have five minutes to write down as many examples as they can to support their position.

**Assign roles:** You may wish to have students assign roles in their respective groups, determining who will be the *note taker*, the *time keeper*, *debaters*, and *debate researchers* who can go back to the debate between Malcolm X and James Baldwin to gather key

points made in the debate. Note the number of debaters can range from one student presenting every point to multiple students presenting fewer points each. Explain to the students that your role is to guide the students through the debate steps.

## **Part II: Engaging the Respectful Debate (15 minutes)**

1. **Reconvene** as a whole class.
2. **Pro side starts the debate:** “Pro” side gives their position and supports with one or two examples to support their position.
3. **Con side summarizes** (“reflects back”) what the “pro” side said and confirms with the “pro” side whether they summarized accurately. If not the “pro” side can offer clarifying statements. Then the “con” side gives their own position and supports with one or two examples.
4. **Pro side responds:** “Pro” side summarizes what the “con” side said and confirms with the “con” side whether they summarized accurately. If they did not, they can provide clarifying statements. The “pro” side then has the option of providing one additional example in support of their own position, if they wish.
5. **“Con” side responds:** “Con” side summarizes what the pro side said and confirms with the pro side whether they summarized accurately. If not the “pro” side can provide clarifying statements. The “con” side then has the option of providing one additional example in support of their own position.

## **Part III: Debaters Switch Sides for Perspective Taking (15 minutes)**

1. **Debaters will swap sides:** Using the same debate statement have the “pro” side and “con” side switch and repeat steps 1-5 as well as the “generate ideas” and “assign roles” steps of the lesson preparation. The switching of sides is a *critical element of the lesson* to help stretch student thinking to see the topic from a different perspective.

## **Part IV: Reflection & Assessment (8-10 minutes)**

1. Facilitate a conversation about the skill of perspective-taking, which is the ability to see situations from multiple perspectives.

Sample questions:

- Has your opinion changed at all about charismatic leadership and social change from when we started? How so?
- Did summarizing what the other side said and/or switching sides change your opinion? What about the summary was helpful?
- What lessons does this activity teach us about opinions we have today about issues in the news or historical events?
- How might debates like this help you question issues in history, current events, or the school, and consider other perspectives?
- How does exercising mutual respect for opposing views bring different results from debating opposing views?
- How did it feel to disagree with someone's points of view but also hold an appreciation for their point of view? How might this skill be helpful in society today?

**Formative Assessment:** After the discussion have students choose any one of the questions, or assign the lesson debate statement, to write in on a paper exit ticket or a digital padlet posting [padlet website](#). Padlet is a Google-chrome extension. Feel free to modify this step as you see fit for your learners.

**Lesson Extension:** For an extended writing activity to practice argumentative writing skills, have students develop a claim reflecting their stance on the debate statement and integrate evidence from the debate and any additional research they wish to pursue to support their claim.

**Background Source:** *“Great Debates, Malcolm X and James Baldwin, June 1963”*.

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"No label, no slogan, no party, no skin color, and indeed, no religion is more important than the human being." - James Baldwin

Both James Baldwin and Malcolm X were heroes of the civil rights movement. Baldwin's books, essays, and speeches painted a poignant portrait of black life in the United States prior to desegregation. Baldwin's observations, experiences, and reflections left him with a nuanced stance which was relatable to many Americans. His realism and relatable anecdotes touched a nerve with readers and listeners across the country. Less optimistic than Martin Luther King Jr. and too peaceful for the followers of Malcolm X, Baldwin's views made him unique in the civil rights movement. But it was Baldwin's public dialogue with iconic black leaders that helped refine our vision for a fair and equal America. Malcom X, joined the debate team in prison and

when released quickly became one of the leading and most outspoken civil rights leaders and advocates of black nationalism.

In 1963, James Baldwin was on a speaking tour. He had witnessed and participated in civil rights protests across the country and had much to discuss with Malcolm X during a radio broadcast on September 5th. The two men were at odds. James Baldwin was devastated and disheartened by the climate of race relations. He advocated strong and purposeful action but never wavered from peaceful methods. Malcolm X, by contrast, saw no path forward for black America without aggressively claiming rights for all oppressed peoples. He feared that any concessions made in the face of passive actions or pleas would be framed as gifts from the oppressors. Malcolm X maintained that equality could not be given; it had to be taken.

James Baldwin understood the plight and angst of Malcolm X. He was respectful and sympathetic to the ideas presented by the activist. But Baldwin never diverged from his peaceful stance. He said, "maintaining calm in the face of vitriol demands a tremendous amount of power." Baldwin believed that our success was tied into our ability to unite with and convert the oppressors. He saw socialist principles as the answer and disputed any suggestions to voluntarily separate ourselves from our brethren in order to achieve equality. It was a powerful and prophetic meeting of the minds. The debate between Malcolm X and James Baldwin was part of an ongoing discussion about the path to equality.

Baldwin and Malcom X taught us that we don't always have to agree. Honest, thorough, and heartfelt opinions will lead us in the right direction. When faced with a challenge as large as social equality, our voices can change the trajectory of the conversation, adjust the focus, and create empathy for the cause. It is our duty to express ourselves when injustice runs rampant.

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Source: Fogel, Erik. Great Debates: New York City Urban Debate League Website. Blog Post. November 6, 2017. Web address: <https://blog.debate.nyc/historical-debates/great-debates-james-baldwin-and-malcolm-x-september-1963>