

DREAM OF A NATION

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10th Grade Common Core Alignment Congressional Debate

Congressional debates give your students an opportunity to develop 21st century skills they will need throughout their professional lives: information literacy, problem solving, persuasion, public speaking and civil dialogue. This unit plan gives teachers tools to aid students in crafting an argument for a congressional debate. A congressional debate requires that students craft pro and con arguments on one topic. Student will deliver both sides of the argument to the class. Students are judged on the strength of their argument and presentation of that argument. Students may be judged by each other, the school's debate team, impartial teachers, administrators or community volunteers.

This process is aligned to English Language Arts Common Core Standards for 10th grade and utilizes the rich resource of *Dream of a Nation*. *Dream of a Nation* is a high Lexile level (1340), non-fiction text which aptly supports the Common Core emphasis on text range, quality and complexity. All *Dream of a Nation* chapters and articles are applicable for this Unit Plan. The standards addressed are the following:

Common Core Information Reading Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.5 Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

Common Core Writing Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1a Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1b Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1c Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1d Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Common Core Language Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will gain understanding of a problem related to a current social, political, environmental or economic issue found in *Dream of a Nation*.
- Students will complete further research on the topic independently, take effective notes on the topic, and synthesize the information they research into two persuasive and contrasting position statements.
- Students will present their position statement to their peers, using their notes but not reading directly from their notes, in a clear voice and utilizing the conventions of Standard English.
- Students will be able to respond to questions and comments made by their peers after their speech, in a clear voice and utilizing the conventions of Standard English.

Teacher Planning:

This is a unit plan. Depending on length of class time and student reading and writing ability this unit can take from two to five weeks. Students need to have read one chapter from *Dream of a Nation*. Strategies for helping students understand readings are located in the [teacher resources section of our website](#).

Unit Plan: Class Debate using *Dream of a Nation*

1. Choosing the Debate

Student positions will be determined by selecting the issue they are most interested in from the chapters in *Dream of a Nation*. There are many debatable issues addressed in *Dream of a Nation*. Teachers should help students to clearly articulate the issue they wish to debate as well as clearly articulate the pro and con positions without giving students specific evidence to support those positions. Possible debate topics include but are not limited to:

- Incorporating a flat rate income tax Chapter 3 & *Switching Taxes to Get American Working*
- Increase funding for public defenders *Reforming Prisons, Saving Billion, Creating Opportunity*
- Increase the authority of the FDA to ban toxic chemicals *Avoiding the Dangers of Toxic Exposure*
- Banning junk food in school cafeterias *Strengthening the Food and Health Connection*

- Divert biofuel funding to development of nuclear energy *A Green Energy Future Without Expanding Nuclear*
- The US should withdraw from Iraq Chapter 11 & *Redefining Security for Strong Communities and a Safer World*
- The US should ban drilling for oil by US companies in Nigeria *A Look at the Niger River* (Chap. 9 pg.296)
- Begin oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Chapters 2 & 6
- The US should open its borders *Immigrants in America: Common Values, Common Dreams*
- Lift the tariff on the imports of Brazilian ethanol Chapter 6 & *Make it in America*
- Increase AIDS funding in developing nations *0.7% of Wealth: A Small Price to End Global Extreme Poverty and Tackling the Profit Problem in Healthcare*
- The US should impose term limits for congressional representatives and senators Chapter 1
- Increase the minimum wage Chapter 3 and *Reallocating Military Spending, Taking Care of Soldiers and Increasing National Security*
- The US should implement direct democracy Chapters 1 & 10
- The US should repeal the “No Child Left Behind Act” Chapter 5
- The US should require US businesses and citizens to be carbon free by 2023 Chapter 6
- The US should cease contracting with corporations that outsource for its workers *Make it in America*
- The US should make voting mandatory Chapter 1
- The US should adopt a universal health care system *Tackling the Profit Problem in Healthcare*
- The US should revoke the President’s Trade Promotion Authority Chapter 3
- Giving tax incentives to corporations who produce hybrid-fuel vehicles Chapter 6
- Establish federal infrastructure funds for public education Chapter 5
- Replace the federal minimum wage with a living wage *Citizens Strengthening Democracy*
- Implement a pre-1976 tax code Chapter 8
- Enforce Anti-Monopoly legislation *The Next Generation of Family Farming*

3. Gather Facts

Once students have a good idea of the pro and con positions they need to research the strongest arguments supporting both sides. Students can begin their research on the [solution page](#) on the *Dream of a Nation* website. They can click on the relevant chapter and find partner organizations and relevant legislation, media and discussion regarding the issues raised in the text. In order for students to find the answers to these questions teach them the Trash or Treasure method of note taking instruction: <http://mrjhlbrary.pbworks.com/f/Reading+for+Information+T+%26+T+note+taking+jansen.pdf> Coach them to only write down information which directly answers the above questions.

5. Write an Outline

Prior to practicing their speeches have students complete an outline in which they organize the information they have gathered in their note taking. Students can use the [Congressional Speech Organization Handout](#) to organize the information they will address in their speech and help them to keep their organization logical. They should not, however, read directly from this form when they are speaking.

6. Speaking

After the introductory speech for each legislation, which either teachers or judges or other students can deliver, students deliver **alternating negative and affirmative speeches**. Each of these speeches allows a maximum of three minutes, with a one-minute questioning period.

Speeches should be delivered *extemporaneously*, which means spoken spontaneously based on an outline of notes, rather than recited word-for-word from a manuscript. To do this, a speaker must be well researched and prepared with ideas before arriving at the contest. S/he will deliver the specific arguments that *refute* the opposition and introduce new ideas and perspectives rebuilding his/her own side of debate, rather than

simply repeating ideas shared by speakers on the same side, or ignoring points raised by the opposing side.

In refuting, speakers should refer to specific arguments made by peers and **never** attack the individual (*ad hominem* fallacy). Be kind, generous and gracious with remarks, for example: “While Sen. Smith’s argument to close the military base is well-intentioned...” It is also effective to refer to general themes/threads made in arguments on a particular side, synthesizing and weighing the overall “big picture” impact.

Effective speeches that respond to other arguments made on legislation come as a result of critical **listening** and **taking notes** – called flowing. Keeping track of arguments made on both the affirmative and negative sides – and any proof or evidence that may be questionable is the only way to keep debate dynamic or interactive. Students should be required to take notes and ask questions of their peers.

Asking **questions** helps clarify confusing points in debate and shows a genuine interest in what other speakers are saying. *Questions* usually are not scored by judges, but how well **speakers answer** is scored. Answering questions well shows a judge the speaker can defend his/her arguments and has sound knowledge of the topic. When answering, it’s best to succinctly answer just the question – no more, no less. Coach students to not avoid answering questions; if they don’t understand the question they can paraphrase by saying “what I think you’re asking is...” and then answer. If they don’t know the answer to a question, have them redirect their answer to what they do know about the topic. This skill can be practiced in pairs prior to the debate.

7. Evaluation

Speeches can be evaluated by the classroom teacher, students in the class, students on the school debate team, administrators or community members. Any judges should be given the [Debate Speaking Rubric](#) and the [Congressional Speech Evaluation Form](#). Students should take notes on each presentation in order to ask questions as soon as the speaker is done. Teachers should also collect students’ outlines after each speech in order to evaluate student research and note taking.

Debates can be filmed and each winning presentation can be shown on the school news, local community access channel or schooltube.

Please send *Dream of a Nation* examples of your students’ debates and suggestions for improvement of our Unit Plan. We appreciate your feedback and insights.