

5. Issue Debate

Introduction

The final activity in this lesson module brings together the material learned in the previous activities and challenges students to use it in a classroom style debate. In the Opposing Viewpoints activity, students created argument statements after completing their Venn diagrams. These statements will form the basis for a classroom debate. Be sure to inform students that they may be arguing for issues against their personal beliefs, but understanding and sympathizing with various viewpoints is a valuable skill. The teacher/moderator will score each team using the provided rubric and declare a winner at the end of the debate. The debate outlined below is a written style debate that will allow groups of students to research and construct arguments before presenting in writing to their opponents to dissect and counter. The outline below splits the class into two groups, but multiple topics and groups can be used to suit larger classrooms.

Procedure

1. Initial Argument

The class will be split into two groups, for example a “money should be kept in politics” group and a “money should be removed from politics” group. Using the argument statements from the previous activity, each group will create a statement using the strongest reasoning agreed upon by the group (groups should include 3-5 of the strongest arguments). Allow a group representative to announce the initial argument and post it on the board or projector for the opposing group to view.

<p>Money should be removed from politics because...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private financing of campaigns magnifies the power of large donors. • It limits opportunities for qualified yet unconventional candidates. • It forces elected officials to spend too much time on fundraising and not enough on their constituents. 	<p>Money should be part of the political process because...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cap on spending by incumbents or challengers would produce a less informed electorate. • Spending produces a more competitive election. • It advances the quality of democracy and leads to a vibrant political community.
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2. Counter Arguments and Questions

Once initial arguments have been made, groups can now convene to construct counter arguments and questions based on the opposite group’s initial statement. Each group will create a counter argument for each initial argument as well as 3 questions for the other group to answer. These will be written on a sheet of paper and group representatives will trade papers.



3. Concluding Statement

Once students have traded counterarguments and questions, groups can begin crafting their concluding statement. In their concluding statement, groups will state the initial argument, choose 1-2 counter arguments to refute, answer their opposition’s questions, and provide closing remarks. Each group will have a representative read their concluding statement. The teacher will then tally each group’s scores and declare a winner.

Counter Argument and Questions Example and Structure:

<p>Initial Argument: Money should be removed from politics because private financing of campaigns magnifies the power of large donors, it limits opportunities for qualified yet unconventional candidates, and it forces elected officials to spend too much time of fundraising and not enough on their constituents.</p> <p>Counter Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If candidates didn't receive money from large donors national ad campaigns would be nearly impossible. • The two dominant parties rarely nominate unconventional candidates. • If candidates don't fundraise during their campaign it will be difficult to gain support from lobbyists once in office. <p>Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is the electorate supposed to know which candidates are truly committed without large fundraising campaigns? 2. Why would someone want to run for high public office without making a high salary? 3. Wouldn't the ballot get crowded if anyone could run regardless of how much money they have raised? 	<p>Initial Argument: Money should not be removed from politics because a cap on spending by incumbents or challengers would produce a less informed electorate, spending produces a more competitive election, and it advances the quality of democracy and leads to a vibrant political community.</p> <p>Counter Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of money in politics would create less controversy and a clearer picture for the electorate. • Competitive elections are dominated by candidates with money, leaving no room for candidates without a lot of money to succeed. • The absence of money in politics creates a more level playing field. <p>Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is the middle and lower class voice supposed to be heard when the rich dominate politics? 2. How can our government be considered a democracy when "the dollar" clearly has the largest vote? 3. What is to keep candidates from "buying" votes?
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Lesson Timeline

Assign groups and craft initial arguments	15 minutes
Write counter arguments and create questions 	25 minutes
Answer questions and construct concluding statements 	30 minutes
Tally scores and declare winner	5 minutes

Scoring Rubric

Use this rubric to score each group. You will score each part of this activity on a scale of 1-10 (weak-strong).

	Initial Statements	Counter Arguments	Answers to Questions	Concluding Statement	Total
Group 1					
Group 2					