

Debate: The Art of Persuasion

Overview

Description

Students will participate in a debate in which they must research, explain, support, and defend a position. The issue may be contemporary, historical, or literary. This assignment also requires students to listen to, analyze, evaluate, and respond to claims and counterclaims made by the opposing side. They will practice using a variety of rhetorical devices in their arguments and counterarguments.

Final Product: After watching, reading, and studying the argumentative strategies used in debates, students will construct a debate in written form. They will then participate in an oral debate. Finally, they will evaluate how well other debaters use the tools of persuasion.

Subject

English III, English IV, Cross-Disciplinary

Task Level

Grade 11-12

Objectives

Students will:

- Cite relevant information and events to support arguments.
- Construct defensible interpretations of data.
- Listen attentively to other debaters, taking careful note of their claims and how they are supported.
- Identify and evaluate arguments and counterarguments.
- Analyze the effectiveness of other debaters' use of rhetorical devices.
- Take a position on a proposed issue.
- Collaborate with peers to construct arguments and counterarguments on the issue.
- Organize facts and other information collected to support specific arguments.
- Prioritize parts of the argument (claims, subclaims, support).
- Write out one side of an agreed-upon debate topic.
- Participate actively in the debate.

- Provide feedback to the opposing team.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages, the *Debate Feedback Form* handout, and the *Debate Organizer* handout.
- Locate debates that credibly investigate an issue for student viewing and listening.
- Locate transcripts for debates, when possible (e.g., see <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=debate-history> for transcripts).
- Choose one debate (by politicians or others) and select a portion to review with the students. If a video of the debate is available, show students the portion you have chosen and share the transcript with them.

Compile a list of potential debate topics prior to the class session in which students are to come up with their list of debatable topics. The following websites offer information on debates and lists of topics that can be of use in the classroom: <http://idebate.org/debatabase> and <http://www.debate.org/opinions/>.

Prior Knowledge

- Students should have substantial knowledge about what constitutes a good argument and about the role of argument in a substantive debate.
- Students must know that skilled debaters argue a position or point-of-view and defend it with good reasoning and solid evidence.
- Students should know that skilled debaters try to view the issue through a variety of perspectives and carefully research both sides of an argument in order to anticipate what opponents may argue and thereby strengthen their position.
- They should also have some familiarity with identifying the rhetorical strategies used in a debate and be able to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Students should be knowledgeable about effective strategies for using the Internet for research.
- Students have prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading and should be comfortable using word processing software.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Alliteration
- Bandwagon
- Concrete examples
- Ethos
- Imagery

- Logical fallacy
- Logos
- Parallel structure
- Pathos
- Red herring
- Straw man argument

Time Frame

This assignment will take at least five class periods to complete. In class, students will review how arguments are constructed by listening to and viewing a substantive debate. They will identify the rhetorical strategies used in a debate and evaluate their effectiveness. They will later take a position on a proposed issue and work with peers to develop arguments and counterarguments. They will continue their work outside of class to develop and construct their arguments and counterarguments, conducting research as needed. The debates will be presented during class, and students will evaluate their own and each other's work.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Listen attentively to the debate.
- Identify rhetorical devices used in the debate's arguments and counterarguments.
- Analyze the effectiveness of the rhetorical devices used in the arguments.

Procedure

1. Introduce a chosen section of the debate.
2. If a video of the debate is available, view it along with a transcript if available. If no video or audio recording is available, read the chosen section of the transcript together.
3. Review previous lessons on argumentation and on the strategic use of pathos, logos, and ethos.
4. Introduce relevant rhetorical devices and point to examples of their use to students. (Examples might be alliteration, analogy, metaphor, and parallel sentence structure.)
5. Discuss why the debaters used the rhetorical devices.
6. Have students work in pairs to review another section of the transcript of the debate to identify claims, support, and rhetorical devices.
7. Have groups share their findings and discuss the effectiveness of the strategies used by these debaters.

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Take a position on a proposed issue.
- Collaborate with peers in a small group to construct arguments and counterarguments on the issue.
- Discover, organize, evaluate, and select the facts and other information collected; establish claims and subclaims; and articulate rationale.

Procedure

1. Present several controversial issues to the students (see websites recommended in Preparation section).
2. Divide the students into small groups of no more than five students for each side of a given issue.
3. Have students work in their groups to develop arguments based on reasons supported by facts and other reliable information. Out-of-class research will be required as students discover where they require additional information or support.
4. Have students work in their groups to develop counterarguments they will need to address.
5. Instruct groups to use rhetorical devices in crafting their arguments.
6. Have groups prepare by filling out the *Debate Organizer* handout.
7. Suggest that students practice their arguments within their groups to prepare for the debate.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Participate actively as both speakers and listeners.
- Provide feedback to the opposing team.

Procedure

1. Establish the procedures for the debate (e.g., time allotted to each group, order of speakers within groups).
2. Ask for volunteer group to begin the debate.
3. Make certain everyone participates in the debate. Those who are listening are expected to complete their *Debate Feedback Form* handouts.
4. Instruct students observing groups to take notes on the argumentative claims, support, and rhetorical devices being used to determine their effectiveness.
5. Have students fill out the *Debate Feedback Form* handouts, and return them to the debating groups.
6. Continue debates until all groups have had the opportunity to participate.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Students may find color-coded texts helpful. The instructor could provide students with a transcript of a sample debate with the rhetorical proofs (i.e., ethos, logos, pathos) highlighted. The instructor may want to highlight details and claims that use logos in one color, pathos in a second color, and ethos in a third. Alternatively, teachers can help students highlight passages as a group, and then discuss how each side's claims and arguments differ. They can also have students note rhetorical devices, such as alliteration, parallelism, and imagery.
- Allow students extra time to research and develop arguments.
- Provide students assistance as they develop arguments.
- Provide students additional models of debates such as presidential debate or professional debate videos.
- Provide students additional time for peer review.

The suggestions provided here are intended to address problems you may encounter when using this assignment:

- If you ask students to write up their debates, they can use the writing process to work with peers to strengthen their writing skills.
- When viewing debates or reading transcripts with students, the instructor should model how to annotate a text. Instructors should offer a written transcript that students can review and mark up. Effective debates often draw on statistics, stories, and other forms of support to back up claims. If students are making claims without substantial support, they should revisit their arguments, do more research, and revise their debates accordingly.
- If students need some assistance in constructing their debates, here are several helpful web sites:
 - <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jHUDSON/takingsides.html>
 - http://www.triviumpursuit.com/speech_debate/what_is_debate.htm
 - <http://www.sites4teachers.com/links/redirect.php?url=http://7-12educators.about.com/library/howto/htdebate.htm>

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
B.1. Consider arguments and conclusions of self and others.		✓	✓
B.2. Construct well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions.			✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
F.3. Include the ideas of others and the complexities of the debate, issue, or problem.			✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.4. Identify the key information and supporting details.	✓	✓	✓
A.5. Analyze textual information critically.	✓	✓	✓
A.6. Annotate, summarize, paraphrase, and outline texts when appropriate.		✓	
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.		✓	
C.2. Explore a research topic.		✓	✓
C.4. Evaluate the validity and reliability of sources.		✓	✓
C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.		✓	✓
C.6. Design and present an effective product.			✓

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.		✓	✓

A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.		✓	✓
<i>III. Speaking</i>			
B.2. Participate actively and effectively in group discussions.		✓	
B.3. Plan and deliver focused and coherent presentations that convey clear and distinct perspectives and demonstrate solid reasoning.		✓	✓
<i>IV. Listening</i>			
A.1. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of a public presentation.			✓
A.2. Interpret a speaker’s message; identify the position taken and the evidence in support of that position.	✓		✓
B.1. Listen critically and respond appropriately to presentations.			✓
B.3. Listen actively and effectively in group discussions.		✓	

TEKS Standards Addressed

<i>Debate: The Art of Persuasion - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading</i>
110.34.b.9. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.9.A. Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion. 110.34.b.9.B. Explain how authors writing on the same issue reached different conclusions because of differences in assumptions, evidence, reasoning, and viewpoints. 110.34.b.9.D. Synthesize ideas and make logical connections (e.g., thematic links, author analysis) among multiple texts representing similar or different genres and technical sources and support those findings with textual evidence.
110.34.b.10. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about persuasive text and provide evidence from text to support their analysis. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.10.A. Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships (e.g., implication, necessity, sufficiency) among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. 110.34.b.10.B. Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.

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110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea.

110.34.b.7.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning.

110.34.b.7.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases.

110.34.b.7.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

110.34.b.7.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

110.34.b.17. Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.17.A. Use and understand the function of different types of clauses and phrases (e.g., adjectival, noun, adverbial clauses and phrases).

110.34.b.17.B. Use a variety of correctly structured sentences (e.g., compound, complex, compound-complex).

110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.

110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.

110.34.b.20. Research/Research Plan. Students ask open-ended research questions and develop a plan for answering them. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.20.A. Brainstorm, consult with others, decide upon a topic, and formulate a major research question to address the major research topic.

110.34.b.20.B. Formulate a plan for engaging in in-depth research on a complex, multi-faceted topic.

110.34.b.21. Research/Gathering Sources. Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.21.A. Follow the research plan to gather evidence from experts on the topic and texts written for informed audiences in the field, distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources and avoiding over-reliance on one source.

110.34.b.21.B. Systematically organize relevant and accurate information to support central ideas, concepts, and themes, outline ideas into conceptual maps/timelines, and separate factual data from complex inferences.

110.34.b.21.C. Paraphrase, summarize, quote, and accurately cite all researched information according to a standard format (e.g., author, title, page number), differentiating among primary, secondary, and other sources.

Debate: The Art of Persuasion - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading

110.34.b.22. Research/Synthesizing Information. Students clarify research questions and evaluate and synthesize collected information. Students are expected to:

- 110.34.b.22.A. Modify the major research question as necessary to refocus the research plan.
- 110.34.b.22.B. Differentiate between theories and the evidence that supports them and determine whether the evidence found is weak or strong and how that evidence helps create a cogent argument.
- 110.34.b.22.C. Critique the research process at each step to implement changes as the need occurs and is identified.

110.34.b.23. Research/Organizing and Presenting Ideas. Students organize and present their ideas and information according to the purpose of the research and their audience. Students are expected to synthesize the research into an extended written or oral presentation that:

- 110.34.b.23.A. Provides an analysis that supports and develops personal opinions, as opposed to simply restating existing information.
- 110.34.b.23.B. Uses a variety of formats and rhetorical strategies to argue for the thesis.
- 110.34.b.23.C. Develops an argument that incorporates the complexities of and discrepancies in information from multiple sources and perspectives while anticipating and refuting counter-arguments.
- 110.34.b.23.E. Is of sufficient length and complexity to address the topic.

110.34.b.24. Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:

- 110.34.b.24.A. Listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content and by identifying the positions taken and the evidence in support of those positions.
- 110.34.b.24.B. Assess the persuasiveness of a presentation based on content, diction, rhetorical strategies, and delivery.

110.34.b.25. Listening and Speaking/Speaking. Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to formulate sound arguments by using elements of classical speeches (e.g., introduction, first and second transitions, body, and conclusion), the art of persuasion, rhetorical devices, eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.

110.34.b.26. Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.

Debate: The Art of Persuasion

Introduction

Participating in a debate will help develop your persuasive skills, which serve as the foundation of most speaking and writing. All of us—not just political leaders, published authors, and interscholastic debaters—make claims and use rhetorical devices to persuade people. Debating a controversial issue will help you strengthen your ability to build, support, and articulate a particular argument. Although we'll adhere to many of the principles of interscholastic debate, our procedures will differ.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Read the transcript of the debate your instructor has chosen. If the instructor has provided you with a video or audio of the debate, pay close attention to it.
2. While viewing or listening to a debate, take notes and ask questions as the instructor points out some of the rhetorical devices and explains how and why they are being used.
3. Work with a partner to review the assigned sections of the transcript.
4. Highlight the rhetorical devices you have found and studied in the debate and discuss their effectiveness with your partner.
5. Share your findings with the rest of the class and participate in the discussion about their effectiveness.

Investigating

1. Choose a position on the assigned controversy.
2. Work with your assigned group to explore the issue in order to develop arguments and counterarguments.
3. Fill out the *Debate Organizer* handout to help you organize your arguments to use while debating.
4. Construct a fully fleshed-out argument that employs some of the rhetorical strategies discussed during this unit.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Participate in the debate by offering your arguments and counterarguments.
2. Listen to the debates when you are not directly participating, taking careful notes to provide feedback to the participating groups about the effectiveness of their arguments.
3. Fill out *Debate Feedback* forms for each debate and return them to the groups who were debating.

Debate Organizer

Issue and Position

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Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Potential Counterargument	Defense Against Counterargument	
Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Potential Counterargument	Defense Against Counterargument	

Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Potential Counterargument	Defense Against Counterargument	
Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Potential Counterargument	Defense Against Counterargument	

Closing

Opposing Position

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Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Refutation:		
Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Refutation:		

Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Refutation:		
Argument:	Support:	Rhetorical Devices Employed:
Refutation:		

Closing

Debate Feedback Form

As your peers in other groups present, listen attentively and take notes so that you may provide them with feedback that will help them in their next debate.

(Note: 4 is the highest – 1 is the lowest)

1. Team members clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information forcefully and convincingly.

4 3 2 1

Comments:

2. All arguments (claim plus support) were clearly tied to the issue and position argued and were organized in a tight, logical fashion.

4 3 2 1

Comments:

3. All counterarguments were accurate, relevant, and strong.

4 3 2 1

Comments:

4. Rhetorical devices (imagery, parallel structure, etc.) were used effectively. Write one of the rhetorical devices you heard in the comments section below.

4 3 2 1

Comments: