

EXPRESSING OPINIONS CONSTRUCTIVELY



AGENDA

- Starter
- Why a Debate?
- How Will It Work?
- Express Yourself!
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognise that it is possible to communicate productively when disagreeing with others.

Students will participate in a debate, using effective communication skills to express and listen to opinions.

Materials Needed

- A place to display the rules for the debate (Part II)

Starter (3 minutes)

Begin by sharing with students the following joke about miscommunication. Use gestures and tone of voice to illustrate the story:

Two students are riding home on the bus one day. Suddenly, one of them points out the window and exclaims, "Look at that dog with one eye!" The other student quickly covers one eye and says, "Where? I don't see a dog!"

Point out that even when people are communicating well, sometimes misunderstandings can still occur. Say, "This doesn't happen on purpose, and it isn't done to mislead or hurt anyone. When misunderstandings happen, remember to laugh. Keep this advice in mind as we put our communication skills to the test today."

Part I Why a Debate? (5 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognise that it is possible to communicate productively when disagreeing with others.

1. Students discuss the nature and purpose of a debate.

Ask students to explain what a debate is. After a few responses, focus on important points by asking questions such as the following:

- Is an argument the same as a debate? (An argument is usually a private, informal discussion between two people about something personal. A debate is more formal in that it has rules and is usually a public event.)
- What is the purpose of a debate? (The purpose of a debate is to give or express reasons for and against something, and present both sides of an issue.)
- What debates have you heard or seen? Can you think of any examples of a debate? (Most students will probably cite candidates running for public office who have debated each other.)
- How would you describe the types of behaviour normally exhibited by participants in a debate? (Participants in a debate are mindful of the debate's rules, respect differing opinions, and calmly explain their side of the issue.)

2. Students consider the concept of friendly disagreements.

Ask students if they think it is possible to communicate effectively even when they disagree with someone. Encourage students to explain their answers, prompting them to give reasons and cite examples.

Guide students to the understanding that assertive behaviours would allow them to communicate effectively in such situations. If necessary, remind them that passive and aggressive behaviours can sometimes produce negative reactions in other people. Ask students to explain why.

Part II How Will It Work? (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students choose a topic to debate and become familiar with rules for the debate.

1. Students choose a topic.

Explain that students are going to conduct a debate in class today. Point out that before the class can debate, they must decide on an issue to discuss.

Read the list of statements below one at a time, asking for a show of hands after each one from students who agree and disagree. Ask students to write each statement number on the board, along with the number of students who agree and disagree.

1. Students should not be required to wear uniforms to school.
2. Boys and girls should be allowed to try out for and play on any school sports team.
3. Students who fail classes should not be promoted to the next grade.
4. Schools and libraries should have tighter internet on computers used by young people.
5. Children should be allowed to see any movie they choose, including R-rated movies.
6. Animals should be left to live in their natural habitats, not kept in zoos or circuses.

Explain that the class will debate the topic that has the most even number of students agreeing and disagreeing.

2. Students review rules for the debate.

Explain that during the debate, students will need to communicate their thoughts and opinions in the most effective way possible. They will also need to listen carefully to the opinions of others in order to formulate a response. In order to do this, everyone must follow.

Part III Express Yourself! (30 minutes)

Purpose: Students participate in a debate, using effective communication skills to express and listen to opinions.

1. Students reflect on their experience.

When the debate is finished, have students discuss their experience. Ask questions such as the following to prompt them:

- How was this debate different from disagreements you have in everyday life?
- What did you find difficult about the debate?
- What behaviours did you find most effective in communicating your opinion?
- What behaviours did you find most frustrating when listening to others?
- Did you change your mind about anything during the debate?
- Was it difficult to remember to use assertive behaviour during the debate? If so, why do you think it was difficult?

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to explain the benefits of practicing assertive behaviour during disagreements. Ask students to describe effective communication skills. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Effective communication skills are necessary when expressing your opinions.
- You can improve your communication skills by using them.

Student Assessment

1. What are some things you can do to keep a friendly disagreement from becoming an argument?
2. In what ways was the controlled debate different from disagreements you have in your life?
3. What did you find frustrating about the debate? What did you find interesting or helpful?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”

Discuss how choosing words carefully is important to expressing opinions constructively.

Civics and Citizenship

Have students find a current news article and identify the purpose, implicit/explicit bias and audience of the text.

Writing in Your Journal

Explain that people often write down notes before important phone calls, especially if the topic is potentially stressful. Have students make notes for a conversation they’d like/need to have.

Using Technology

Have students watch live Parliament and discuss the communication strategies observed. Take notes about the effectiveness of the communication presented.

Homework

Have students collect “letters to the editor” from a news source that pertain to a single subject. Have them underline key phrases that give clues to each writer’s tone.

Additional Activity

Watch an episode of your favourite TV show. Choose three characters, discuss their communication styles.