

# EXPRESSING OPINIONS CONSTRUCTIVELY

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## AGENDA

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

## Objectives

Students will recognize 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 recognize 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 behavior 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 behaviors would allow them to communicate effectively in such situations. If necessary, remind them that passive and aggressive behaviors can sometimes produce negative reactions in other people. Ask volunteers to explain why.

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## 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 volunteers to write each statement number on the board, along with the number of students who agree and disagree.

1. Students should be required to wear uniforms to school.
2. Schools should be able to perform random locker searches for drugs and weapons.
3. Students who get in trouble with the law off school grounds should be expelled.
4. Students who fail classes should be promoted to the next grade.
5. Schools and libraries should block parts of the internet on computers used by young people.
6. Children should be allowed to see any movie they choose, including R-rated movies.
7. 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. If necessary, conduct another vote to break ties, flip a coin, or draw statements from a hat.

### 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 some basic rules.

Display the following list of rules, which you have prepared as a poster or transparency before class. Read through them aloud, or call on a volunteer to read each one:

- Only one person may speak at a time.
- Speakers must alternate from one side to the other.
- If you want to make a point, you must raise your hand and wait to be called on.
- You cannot raise your hand until the person who is speaking has finished.
- If someone on the other side makes a point you agree with, you must get out of your seat and move to the other side. This does not mean that you have permanently changed sides; this means only that you agree with one particular point. When someone on the other side (that is, your original side) makes a point that you agree with, return to your seat.

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### Part III Express Yourself! (30 minutes)

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

#### 1. Students prepare for the debate.

Direct students to assist you with lining up chairs to form two rows facing each other. Remember that students will be moving back and forth between rows, so be sure that there are no obstacles to block their way.

Read aloud the statement that the class will debate, and write it prominently on the board. Have all students who agree with the statement sit in one row, and those who disagree sit in the other row.

#### 2. Students participate in the debate.

Begin the debate by asking, "Who has an opinion about this statement?" Call on a student who has a hand raised.

As the debate coach, it is important that you enforce the rules by letting only one student talk at a time, calling on students from alternating sides, calling only on those who wait until others stop talking before raising their hand, and reminding students to change sides when they agree with points made by someone on the other side.

It is also important that you do not offer an opinion or take sides on the topic. Be sure to keep the discussion on track, and keep individual students from dominating the discussion. Give students a one-minute warning before ending the debate. (Allow about 10 minutes of class time for the final discussion.)

#### 3. 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 behaviors did you find most effective in communicating your opinion?
- What behaviors 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 behavior during the debate? If so, why do you think it was difficult?

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### Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to explain the benefits of practicing assertive behavior 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

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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

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“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. Have students give examples of situations in which it is important for them to be careful with their words.

### Core Content Curriculum Connection

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Have students research the perspectives of participants in their current social studies unit.

Select an issue relevant to the time period being studied. Have students debate the issue from the perspective of the people researched.

### Writing in Your Journal

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

Have students practice their conversations with a classmate until they're able to make their points assertively.

### Using Technology

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Have students watch a Congressional debate on C-Span. Have them write a paragraph summarizing what was discussed.

Have students meet in small groups to discuss the Congressional conduct they observed. How did the congresspeople express their differences? What nonverbal communication was observed?

## Homework

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

Have students share their letters with partners or in small groups, discussing which letters were most effective and why.

## Additional Resources

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Show the 1957 version of the film *12 Angry Men*, which is about jurors debating the fate of a boy accused of killing his father.

After showing the film, have students discuss the communication styles of the various characters.