



Should school be a place for debate?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage mentions the Civil Right Movement in the United States. Here is some information that might be helpful to students less familiar with this history.

Civil Rights Movement (1955-1965)

In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans still faced great legal discrimination—or unjust treatment—for no reason other than their skin color. For example, they were forced to use “black-only” bathrooms and sit at the back of the bus.



Tired of being mistreated, African Americans worked together to fight for the same social and political rights as other Americans. These rights included the right to vote, the right to own property in a neighborhood of their choosing, and the right to be treated equally regardless of their skin color. They organized meetings, rallies, marches, and boycotts in an effort to fight against discrimination. As a result of their hard work, the government passed laws to protect the freedoms and political rights of African Americans.

Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956)

In the 1950s, African Americans were still forced to sit at the back of the bus because of their skin color, even when there were empty seats in the front. In those days, if the front seats were full, and a white passenger needed a seat, the law required African Americans to give their seats to white passengers.



In December 1955, a civil rights activist from Montgomery, Alabama, named Rosa Parks insisted on staying in her seat instead of giving it to a white passenger. Ms. Parks was arrested and forced to pay a fine because she refused to follow the bus driver’s orders. This arrest outraged other African Americans, who then decided that they would boycott—or deliberately choose not to ride—

the bus until the laws were changed. They walked, biked, or carpooled instead.

The boycott was effective. It got the government’s attention and caused the Supreme Court to rule in November 1956 that segregation on a bus was unconstitutional, or against the law. The law went into effect in December and ended the boycott.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a preacher and leader from the African American community. He was passionate about civil rights and inspired many people—blacks, whites, and others—to fight for equality through nonviolent means such as



boycotts, marches, and rallies. He was one of the most prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his work. Dr. King was a gifted speaker and used his speaking ability to unite people and paint a vision for peace and equality among all people. His most famous speech is “I Have a Dream” (August 28, 1963), which Dr. King gave in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., in front of thousands of people. This speech described a nation in which people would “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character,” a nation where “little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

Dr. King was tragically shot and killed on April 4, 1968, by an escaped prison convict named James Earl Ray. In spite of his death, Dr. King’s activism continues to influence and inspire many people today.



Should school be a place for debate?

EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
Students	Many students like to talk when they are in school. If students can discuss a topic, they will be more interested in the topic and learn more. They will learn what their classmates think and practice giving their opinions on the spot. These students feel they will have fun with debates.	Some students may be too shy or not know enough English to participate in debates. They may feel the more talkative students will talk more, and quiet students won't participate. This imbalance will make the debate uneven. These students may not have fun with debates if the discussion gets too loud and chaotic.
Teachers	Teachers may support debate because they want students to learn to explain all sides of an issue. They want their students to hear each other's opinions and practice thinking and speaking on their feet. They want their students to be active in their own learning.	Some teachers may worry that, if students debate in schools, they will not have enough time to teach what students need for exams. Teachers may think they can't control the classroom debate and that things could get out of hand. Teachers might also feel they can't control who participates and that quiet students will be left out.
Parents	Many parents want their kids to learn to argue for what is important to them. These parents want kids to practice thinking and speaking on their feet. They want their kids to develop strong debate skills for their future jobs.	Other parents want their kids to learn factual information from teachers. They may worry the debate will get out of control and that a balanced discussion might not be possible, because students do not know enough information. They may also want to have more influence on the opinions their children develop.
Principals	Principals want students to care about what they are learning and may feel that debate will help. They want their students to be interested in school and excited about class. This interest and excitement could make everyone have more positive feelings about school.	Principals might worry that classrooms will get too loud. They want students to learn as much as they can in class and may be concerned that some information will be left out. These principals may also be afraid debates will be centered around opinions alone and want the teachers to focus on providing information.
Future Employers	Some future employers want workers who can understand and argue for both sides of an issue. They want workers who can think critically on their feet and speak intelligently about difficult topics.	Other future employers want workers who have learned a lot of facts from school. They may want workers to have basic skills needed for a job—not debate skills. They want their workers to follow instructions without having to debate them.

Additional Information

✓ A three-year study (published by the U.S. Department of Education) of 140 elementary classrooms with high concentrations of disadvantaged children found that students whose teachers emphasized “meaning and understanding” were far more successful than those who received basic skills instruction. The researchers concluded by decisively rejecting “schooling for the children of poverty . . . [that] emphasizes basic skills, sequential curricula, and tight control of instruction by the teacher” (Kohn, 2011).

✓ Beran (2004) defends rote learning, arguing that “memorization is a kind of exercise that strengthens the powers of the mind.”

“Poor Teaching for Poor Children...in the Name of Reform” By Alfie Kohn
<https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/poor/>

“In Defense of Memorization” By Michael Knox Beran
http://www.city-journal.org/html/14_3_defense_memorization.html



Should school be a place for debate?

ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Text: *Explicit indicators of multiple views on a topic*

Students are used to reading stories that contain multiple perspectives and can usually figure out the viewpoints of different characters based on what they say, do, or think.

In nonfiction texts, writers explicitly state different viewpoints. While this may seem easier, many students struggle with some of the words and phrases used when discussing multiple perspectives. Some examples are highlighted for you here.

In room 207, Mr. Smith is teaching his students about the civil rights movement. He asks the students questions such as, “Who were the freedom riders?” or “What year was the Montgomery bus boycott?” It is easy for students to find the answers in their textbooks. Mr. Smith tells the students whether they are right or wrong. On Friday, they will have a quiz about these facts.

In room 209, Ms. Miles is also teaching about the civil rights movement. She asks her students, “Is peaceful protest the best way to make things change for the better?” The students have a **debate**. **Some think** Martin Luther King Jr. was right to tell protesters to avoid violence. **Others believe that** sometimes violence is necessary when people will not listen to reason. They ask Ms. Miles for the right answer, but she says there is no right answer.

Some people believe that kids in school should only learn about facts. These people think students should get information from their textbooks or teachers and memorize it. That way, **some argue**, all students will learn the same things and they will all be able to do well on tests.

Other people think debates can be hard because there are no right answers. Sometimes everybody learns different things from a debate. This makes it hard for teachers to give a test to find out what students have learned. Debates also take a lot of time. Teachers who have debates may not be able to cover as many topics in class. Then, students may not learn all of the facts in the textbook.

However, debates may help students understand why the facts they learn in school are important. We live in a democracy, where everyone needs to know how to form and **justify** opinions in order to work together to

make decisions. Young people will not always have a teacher or a textbook to give the right answers, so students need to learn to think for themselves. Each person has a unique **perspective** defined by his or her knowledge, experience, and attitudes. Even teachers and textbook authors have their own perspectives. Through a classroom debate, students hear their classmates’ opinions. Students justify their opinions with evidence from texts and from their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own **biases** and understand a problem in a new way. Hearing classmates’ perspectives during a debate can help students understand the complexity of many important issues. Whether it is better to have teachers teach from the text or to have students engage in debates is a continuing **controversy** in education.

What do you think? Should students learn only facts in school? Or should debates be an important part of their education?



Should school be a place for debate?

GENERATING WORDS

Building Adjectives from Verbs

What is a verb? A verb is a word that shows the action in a sentence. Sometimes the action is silent or goes on in someone's head. Example: "Do you *understand* the meaning?"

What is an adjective? An adjective is a word that describes something or someone. Example: "That is an *understandable* idea." Understandable describes the idea. It means the idea is easy to understand.

When added to a verb, the suffix *-able* means that the action is possible. Many verbs can be turned into adjectives by adding *-able*. If the verb has an *e* at the end of it, we usually drop the *e* before adding *-able*. If the verb ends in *y*, we usually change the *y* to *i* before adding *-able*.



Change these verbs to adjectives:

rely _____

justify _____

amplify _____

reason _____

understand _____

question _____

debate _____

argue _____

believe _____

Discuss the following questions with your partner:

What are some *debatable* topics that you would like to discuss with your class?

Some *debatable* topics that I would like to discuss include _____.

Sometimes friends ask us for a favor. What is an example of a *reasonable* favor? What is an example of an *unreasonable* favor?

A *reasonable* favor would be _____;
whereas, _____ is an *unreasonable* favor.

What are the characteristics of a *reliable* friend?

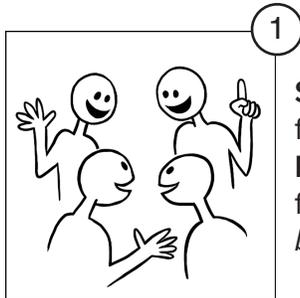
A *reliable* friend is _____.

- ▶ Did you change the *y* to *i* before you added the suffix?
- ▶ Did you drop the *e* before you added the suffix?

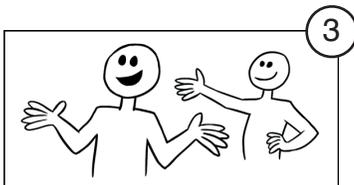


Should school be a place for debate?

DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS



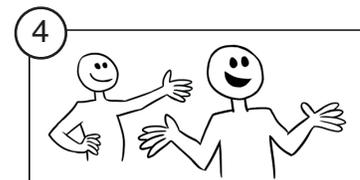
Step One: In a group of four, brainstorm as many **PRO** and **CON** arguments for the topic: *Should school be a place for debate?*



Step Two: All group members memorize the list of **PROs** and **CONs**.

Step Three: Divide the groups of four into pairs and have a discussion by doing the following:

1. One partner is the “director;” the other is the “actor.”
2. The director claps and says, “Should school be a place for debate?: **PRO!**”
3. The actor gives 1-2 **PRO** reasons for having a debate in school.
4. The director claps and says “**CON!**,” and the actor uses a transition like “*However...*,” “*On the other hand...*,” or “*Then again...*” and gives a reason or two for not having debates in school.
5. The director claps again and says “**PRO!**,” and the actor uses a different transition and gives more **PRO** reasons. Repeat.
6. When finished, the director paraphrases what he or she heard and tries to guess which side the actor is really on.



Step Four: Switch roles and repeat **Step Three**.

What the **ACTOR** might say:

- One reason for having debates is...
- Another reason is...
- Additionally, debates in the classroom are positive (negative) because...
- However, on the other hand...
- A reason for not having debates in the classroom is...
- Furthermore, we should not use classroom time for debates because...

What the **DIRECTOR** might say:

- Pro! or Con!
- What I heard you say is...
- I believe you said...
- Correct me if I’m wrong, but I thought I heard you say...
- Based on what I heard, I think that you really believe that...