

# An Introduction to Classroom Debates

## A. Preparing for a Debate?

- Students need to be clear in their understanding of what a debate is!
- Provide students with examples of professional debates (e.g. House of Commons).
- Brainstorm possible debate topics with your students.
- Watch videos of debates.

### Details:

- There is a “For” team and an “Against” team.
- Teams make their arguments FOR or AGAINST a particular statement.

## B. Organise the Teams

- Divide the class into two teams. (It may be worth splitting the class into groups and using 2 or 3 different debate topics at once, so the children not involved in each debate can be the audience that cast their votes)
- Assign one team to be FOR or AGAINST a particular statement.

## C. Decide Teamwork Expectations

- Discuss with your class, what the expectations should be for a positive teamwork experience (e.g., taking turns, respecting the views of others, listening to everyone, keeping noise to a minimum, group rapport).
- Instruct teams to nominate a team CAPTAIN. (Responsibilities include: maintaining team focus, leadership, being fair and unbiased, deciding group member responsibilities).
- Decide how teams will NOMINATE a team Captain (discuss fairness in nominations, including deciding to let your name be nominated, drawing names from a hat, how to vote – tallies, show of hands, etc.)
- GROUP MEMBER Responsibilities: to support the captain, plan and research arguments, participate actively in planning and discussions, collate information and maintain self-control.

## D. Planning the Argument

- Review Teamwork Expectations and tasks with your students.
- The teacher’s role is facilitator, to monitor each group and assist with understanding their roles, maintaining focus, helping generate ideas for appropriate research topics, etc.
- After teams have nominated a Captain and chosen suitable research topics, team members should take responsibility for researching their supporting topics, using all available resources.
- Once research is complete, it is important that each group member have an opportunity to share their research and materials to the group for discussion.
- At that point, the group will need to decide if and how that information should be used, and help members in supporting their arguments. (Would the information contribute to the defence of the argument?)
- Encourage each team to try to imagine what the other team’s arguments and responses are likely to be, so that team members are as prepared as they can be!

**Example topics for debating (motions):**

The voting age should be lowered to 16.

People should be able to drive at 16.

People should be able to become a Member of Parliament at 16.

Everyone should carry an identity card.

Activities that cause pain or death to animals should not be legal.

All households in the UK should be entitled to a free computer.

Higher education should be free.

School uniform leads to better behaved pupils.

Charges should be given to people who don't sort their rubbish for recycling.

All cities should have a congestion charge.