

SECONDARY SCHOOL RESOURCE

CREATE THE DEBATE



EDUCATION
SERVICE



Youth Parliament
MAKING OUR MARK

WELCOME

The Create the Debate pack has been produced by Parliament's Education Service with help from the UK Youth Parliament.

Learning to debate helps to equip students for a life that will be filled with challenging decisions so this pack is full of ideas to encourage debating in secondary schools, ideas that you can adapt and develop to fit your situation and to help students:

- Form opinions
- Justify their viewpoints
- Listen to and learn from others
- Understand how different types of debate work
- Learn about parliamentary debating – and try it out!
- Take part in democratic decision-making

Across the curriculum

Debating can be a powerful learning tool for:

- Citizenship
- Politics and Government
- BTEC Public services
- Assemblies
- History
- English
- Extra-curricular activities such as debating clubs and competitions

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GET WARMED UP

Here are some quick warm-up games and exercises to get students thinking and to lay the groundwork for more formal debating. They can be used sequentially to build up skills over time, or you pick and choose those that are right for your students.

Warm up your voice

Debating is a vocal business so use these fun tongue twisters to get everyone warmed up and speaking clearly. The class stands in a circle and you conduct the tongue-twisters, repeating and speeding up as you go until it all falls apart!

Red leather, yellow leather

Seventy-seven benevolent elephants

She sells seashells on the seashore

Wayne went to Wales to watch walrus

Paper review

Give each group a copy of a newspaper – either printed or online, national or local.

The groups have five minutes to choose three stories from their paper that they think will make good debating subjects.

Allow five minutes more to whittle the choice down to one subject and to list the main points for and against.

Get each group to report back to the whole class.

Ask each group to describe the method they used to agree their final choice such as arguing, secret voting, open voting, coin toss etc.

Draw out the key elements of: individual ideas, opinion forming, influencing others, rational argument, citing facts and accepting the majority opinion.



Vote with your feet

Get the class up on their feet and assign one side of the classroom as 'For' and one as 'Against'.

Flash up on your interactive whiteboard, or call out a range of quick-fire proposals for new laws. The class must vote with their feet, immediately moving to the appropriate side of the room.

You could choose topics that are relevant to your school or area, or use ideas from the 'Paper review' activity, or try one of these topics:

- Tests should be brought in for people wanting to use skateboards as a mode of transport.
- All those aged under 16 should watch a maximum of five hours of television a week.
- School uniform should be banned in all schools.

- School uniform should be compulsory in all schools.
- Owners of large dogs should pass a test to prove they are able to control them.
- The wearing of cycle helmets should be enforceable by law.
- There should be a roughly equal number of female and male MPs.
- The working week and weekend should be swapped – a two-day week and a five-day weekend.
- Students should be free to leave school at 14 and get a job.
- Private car ownership should be banned to protect the environment.

When everyone has voted, ask one or two people from either side to explain why they voted that way. Give students the opportunity to change sides if they wish.



Debate circle

The class sits in a circle. Select an issue such as one of those above, and send this around the circle. The first person says 'Yes, because...' and comes up with a reason for the issue, the second person says 'No, because...' and gives a reason against. Carry on around the circle until you reach the beginning again. People further around the circle will need to think more creatively to offer new ideas.

If anyone gets stuck suggest that they take one of the ideas already given and develop it, as in: 'No, because as Mahinda said it would take all the fun out of skateboarding and I think that this might lead to more social problems'.

Get your message across in a sound-bite

Ask 'What is a sound-bite?' Discuss the key features, clarifying that a 'sound-bite':

- Is a short phrase
- Gives the essence of your message
- Is easy to remember
- Often creates an emotional response in the audience: 'I like that' or 'I agree'

Ask the students to identify any sound-bites that they've come across and then to work in groups to develop a catchy sound bite for or against any issue.

Remind them that a sound-bite is designed to be heard so encourage them to try it out loud to see how it sounds. They might find that their sound-bite harder to say than they expected and that some phrases that look good on paper work less well when read aloud.

DEVELOPMENT

Some people, particularly professionals such as lobby groups with a message to get across, favour the 3-9-27 rule. The idea is that to be short, snappy and effective, a sound bite should cover three points in nine seconds using twenty-seven words. Using one of the ideas above or one of your own, challenge the class in pairs to create their own media sound bite for or against. They need to persuade the listener of their argument in this single phrase, just like the opening of a debate.

EXAMPLE :

Women are under-represented in Parliament; they make up about half the population but are hugely out-numbered by male MPs. Equality matters – we need deeds not words!

This has three points: women are under-represented, they make up half the population, there is a call to action ('deeds not words' is a suffragette slogan). It is twenty-seven words long and takes about nine seconds to say. Stress that the 3-9-27 rule can be used as a guideline; if fifteen words and twelve seconds work better, that's fine!

Watch the Commons or Lords in action

Visit Parliament's YouTube channel to find recent debates in both of the chambers and view them as a class to set the scene.

You can discuss the overall style of the debate, the roles of the people taking part, (including the Speaker of the House of Commons or the Lord Speaker in the House of Lords), and the individual debating styles of the participants. What was effective, what wasn't so effective? You'll find lots of great clips here: www.youtube.com/user/UKParliament



DEBATING METHODS

Use these to build up skills and confidence in a step by step approach or pick and choose the ideas that are right for your students.

Balloon debate

This well-known debating game can serve as a fun introduction to debating. It calls on these key debating elements:

- Clarity of argument
- Ability to get your point across
- Audience voting

METHOD

In the classic version a group of students, say five, (but the number is variable), each pick a famous person to 'speak as'. They stand at the front of the class.

They imagine that they are in a balloon basket and the balloon is losing height so that, one by one, the speakers must be 'jettisoned'!

Each student makes a statement as the famous person explaining why he or she should be saved. When all have spoken, the class votes on whom to throw out of the basket. There is then another round and so on until only one person remains – the winner.

DEVELOPMENT

Keep the structure of the balloon debate but replace the famous people with ideas that the students present and argue for. They could use the 'new law' format (see Vote with your feet).

The UK Youth Parliament campaigns on a number of issues, some specifically affecting young people, others more general and impacting on society as a whole. Details of current campaigns can be found at www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk



Convince me

This is a small-group debating method. It develops many of the skills needed in more formal debating but allows students the safety of group work without being put 'on the spot' in front of the whole class. It is organised as follows:

Split the class into small groups. It is important that these have an odd number of members. A group of five will have one for, one against and three deciders.

A group of seven will have two for, two against and three deciders OR one for, one against and five deciders.

METHOD

A topic is chosen. You could give the same topic to all the groups and, at the end of the session, tally the votes and use this to initiate a class discussion; or each group can have a different topic.

The topics can be given in advance with time to prepare or they can be given with just a few moments thinking time. The first approach is better for developing in-depth thinking and research skills, while the second favours confidence and 'thinking on your feet'.

Allow the 'For' side two minutes to propose the motion to their group and say why they think it is a good idea. Set a stopwatch and call time, blowing a whistle or ringing a bell for changeover. The 'Against' person in each group then opposes the motion, explaining why they do not support the idea. Call time again after two minutes and ask the deciders to vote. The odd number will ensure a result unless you choose to allow abstentions.

If time allows you could then swap around the roles within the groups with new 'For', 'Against' and 'Deciders'.

DEVELOPMENT

You could:

- Allow the debaters to each have a further two minutes to refute each other's argument.
- Allow the deciders to question the debaters after each round.
- Introduce the idea of 'giving way' where anyone in the group can hold up a hand to interrupt the speaker who may agree to 'give way' to allow for a question from their opponent or one of the deciders. You will need to allow more time with this approach. You could appoint one of the deciders in each group as a timekeeper who pauses their timer during interruptions.



Formal House of Commons style debate

Running a House of Commons style debate will bring together all of the debating skills your students have developed and involve everyone in the 'drama' of debating important issues. Students will have to learn to balance their passion for the issue with reasoned and persuasive argument.

Running a House of Commons style debate in the classroom

STEP 1

You may wish to set up the room to look like the House of Commons chamber with rows of chairs facing each other and the Speaker's chair centrally placed at one end. Divide the class into two sides, 'For' - the team proposing the motion, and 'Against' - the team opposing the motion. Give the two teams 10 minutes to discuss their opening argument and key points (at least three) for their side. Remind the teams that for this debate it doesn't matter if they really are 'For' or 'Against' the motion, their challenge is to argue their case effectively and persuade the members of the other team to change their mind. To help these large teams organise, you may wish to subdivide each into three smaller teams to work out the arguments, and then bring these small teams together to agree the main points. Some classes may need additional help at this stage. At the end of this section the teams should:

- Have a clear grasp of the subject of the debate
- Have their opening argument ready
- Have at least three key points to support their argument
- Know who is going to 'lead' on each point

STEP 2

Before you begin, outline the rules for the debate:

- All arguments must be heard. If anyone shouts out or heckles, you as the Speaker will have to call for silence.
- Once the floor is opened for further comments at the end, those wishing to speak must stand to get the speaker's attention and wait to be called to speak.
- All other members on each team should listen carefully to the arguments to decide if they will vote 'For' or 'Against' at the end of the debate – has anyone changed their mind?
- Set a time limit for the entire debate at which point the vote must be taken (Guide time – 15 minutes but this is flexible depending on the age and interest of your group as well as the time available).

STEP 3

Take the role of the Speaker and bring the House to 'Order' before inviting the 'For' team to propose their motion. Next, give the 'Against' team a chance to use their own opening statement in a response. The debate should now move back and forth between the sides until the prepared arguments are finished. The team members may want to amend their arguments as the debate progresses. Once all the statements have been made, the debate can be opened up to the floor so that each side may add their own points. Remind them that they must stand to get the Speaker's attention and wait for permission to speak.

STEP 4

Once the debate has come to a natural lull or when you have run out of time, ask each main spokesperson to sum up their side, beginning with the opposing team, followed by the proposing team. They can use their opening statement as a basis for summing up and add any other ideas from the debate that they feel may persuade people to vote for their view. As the 'Speaker', bring the debate to a close and propose the question to the house for a final vote. You can either 'vote with your feet' (division) by assigning two sides of the room as the 'For' or 'Against' sides, asking the students to move to the side that gets their vote, or by the raising and counting of hands.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Procedure for debate made simple

Start

The Speaker brings the House to order

Use 'Order, order' to bring a dramatic formality to proceedings. Invite the Proposer to speak.

The Member proposing the motion speaks

The proposer should make a simple, direct and clear speech giving just the essence, saving the detail for later in the debate.

The Speaker 'proposes the question'

'The motion before us is _____'. Invite the opposing Member to speak.

The Member opposing the motion speaks

The opposing Member should set their view out in simple, clear and direct terms. They should think on their feet and respond to what has been said – not to what they thought they'd hear!

Is there a third party involved in the debate?

Introduce the notion of a third party for more complex debates where 'For' and 'Against' are not sufficient.

No

Yes

The main spokesperson for the third party speaks

Other speakers give speeches

Invite anyone to speak 'from the floor'. In a heated debate you may need further recourse to 'Order, order'.

Closing opposing Member speaks

This speech should sum up the strongest arguments against the motion, responding to what has been said during the debate.

Closing proposing Member speaks

Go back to the original reason for the motion and restate its importance. Sum up the 'For' arguments taking account of what has been said during the debate.

Speaker reads out motion and 'Puts the Question' to the House

House divides, tellers collate results and report to Speaker, who declares the result

Make the vote dramatic – particularly if it is close and not immediately clear which side has won. Whether you use a 'division' approach or a show of hands, settle everyone with 'Order, order' before announcing the outcome.

Finish



GET ACTIVE - TAKE DEBATING FURTHER AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are many ways to further your students' interest in debating. If they are using debating skills as part of a course they may also want evidence of their work for a project book or similar. Here are a few ideas for next steps:

- Ask the class to write a letter to their local MP to explain why they feel passionately about the topic. Ask for a response and you should receive a reply from them. You can find the details of your local MP here: www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/
- You could also ask the class to write to your local Member of Youth Parliament to find out about their experience of debating in the House of Commons, share your own response to the debate, and find out what local campaigning is being carried out in your area. You can find details of your local MYP here: www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/in-your-area/
- If the debated topic affects your school (i.e. local transport costs, littering etc), ask the class to devise a school campaign to inform and engage other classmates. This may include a wider vote to garner more opinions, creating a committee to discuss the issues further and explore options for change, creating a poster or communication campaign to educate others or presenting ideas to their Head Teacher, a local councillor or MP.
- Take a look at e-petitions on similar themes to your debate or start your own: petition.parliament.uk
- If your students are 16 +, remind them they can now register to vote to prepare for the next general election and get their voice heard at a national level: www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Involve the school council in planning how to progress the issue both within and outside of school.

This can be a great way to practice debating about real issues before 'going public'. You might also like to enter Parliament's popular Speaker's School Council Awards: www.speakersschoolcouncil.org



You can also use our series of debating activity sheets with tips, checklists and a host of ideas for students to use in the classroom.

www.parliament.uk/getdebating

CREATE THE DEBATE PARTNERS

What is the UKYP House of Commons debate?

Each year the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) holds a UK-wide ballot called 'Make Your Mark', where all young people can vote on what they think Members of Youth Parliament should campaign on for the year ahead. The top five issues chosen by young people are then debated by Members of Youth Parliament in the annual House of Commons debate, and the winning issue becomes the UKYP's priority campaign for the next year. You can watch a short film about last year's House of Commons debate at www.byc.org.uk

More about the UK Youth Parliament

The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) provides opportunities for 11-18 year-olds to use their voices in creative ways to bring about social change. The UKYP is made up of approximately 300 MYPs (Members of Youth Parliament), who are elected by their peers in youth elections throughout the UK. Any young person aged 11-18 can stand or vote. Once elected, MYPs organise events and projects, run campaigns and influence decision makers on the issues that matter most to young people. Visit the website to find out about all the fantastic ways in which the UKYP can support young people to continue their journey into politics, from supporting their campaigns through social media and voting in youth elections, to attending events taking place across the UK or even standing as a Member of Youth Parliament themselves. The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) is managed by the British Youth Council, a youth-led charity that aims to empower young people across the UK to have a say and be heard.

Visit www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/get-involved or contact info@ukyouthparliament.org.uk



More about the British Youth Council

Alongside managing UKYP, the British Youth Council (BYC) offers a host of other opportunities for young people to get their voices heard, including getting involved in campaigning, becoming a member of a local youth council, taking part in online surveys, and even standing for election to join the charity's Trustee Board which is made up entirely of young people under 26. The British Youth Council also runs the Young Mayor Network and the Local Youth Council Network. Find out more at: www.byc.org.uk

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