



DEBATE ACTIVITY PACK - NOVICE



Provided by:
World Schools Debating League

ACTIVITY – BASIC EVIDENCE STRUCTURE

This activity introduces note-taking skills using the format of a flow. This simple demonstration shows the class the different components of a piece of evidence and demonstrates how these components should be recorded on a flow sheet.

Time Allotment

10-15 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to the components of a piece of evidence.
- be introduced to recording critical information about a piece of evidence in usable form.

Materials and Preparation

- 2-3 pieces of properly briefed evidence

Method

Prepare a piece of evidence Ask a volunteer to read the evidence aloud to the class. Then ask small groups of students to label the tag, the citation and the card. Point out to students which components of the evidence they should include on their flow.

Go to the chalkboard and flow the evidence properly. Number the arguments and write an abbreviated tag line, the author's name, and the date for each piece of evidence on the transparency on the chalkboard. Discuss with students why each of these items is important to include on a flow. Depending on the skill level of the students, it might make sense to talk about the benefits of flowing the content of the card.

ACTIVITY – CLASH KUNG FU

This activity introduces basic clash and argumentation skills. In this activity, the concept of clash is acted out in a mock fight. This activity provides a way to express the concept of clash in an active and memorable way.

Time Allotment

10-20 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to the concept of direct refutation.

Method

Have students line up in rows facing each other about two feet apart. You should demonstrate the activity in front of the class with a student volunteer. Once you have demonstrated a particular move, tell the student pairs to follow your lead. Instruct your partner not to block, and aim a straight-armed direct punch at his face (of course, your “punch” should be slow moving and you should stop well short of completing the punch). Explain that this is analogous to a conceded argument: it will always be won due to the lack of an answer. Have the pairs of students model the action, emphasizing both the importance of not actually making any physical contact and the strategic mistake of letting your opponent directly connect with an argument.

Next, when you throw a mock punch, have your partner reach up to block your hand or move out of the way. You should explain that avoiding and blocking punches in debate, just like in kung fu, is desirable. The equivalent of a blocked punch is a defensive takeout argument (a no link argument, a statement that the opponent’s argument does not apply, etc.). You want to make sure that your opponent connects as few punches as possible.

Finally, have your partner block your punch and, with his free hand, return a punch aimed at your stomach. The equivalent of this scenario in debate, you should explain, is a turned argument. Turns not only neutralize the damage of an opponent’s argument, they turn the sequence around to your advantage. By using a turn you can turn an opponent’s attack into your advantage. Because you minimize the significance of your opponent’s argument, while gaining an offensive advantage, turns can significantly damage your opponent.

Have your students copy these motions to get the feel of them. This activity is most effective when used as a lead to an extensive lesson about argument theory, direct refutation and line-by-line debating. In ideal situations, this activity can be connected to a previous discussion about an evidenced position. You could encourage the students to use examples that match their moves from the files for arguments you have covered in class. You might, for instance, discuss the affirmative and negative solvency debates for a particular case, asking students to find cards that correspond to defensive take outs and turns.

An alternative activity that can stand alone or compliment Clash Kung Fu is “Battleship.” In this activity, you ask the students if they have heard of Battleship. Ask a student familiar with the game to explain how it is played to the other students. As you know, the object of the game is to sink the opponent’s ships. In the debate analogy, you are trying to sink the opponent’s argument. In Battleship, as in debate, you don’t get credit for having a close hit. You either hit the ship or you don’t, there’s no room to fudge it. In debate, there has to be a direct hit to the logic or evidence of the opponent’s argument in order to neutralize it. If one’s argument doesn’t clash with her opponent’s, it is as if the missile has missed its battleship. The difference between debate and Battleship, is that in debate your opponent announces exactly what their argument is. Tell your students that it is their job to discern, rapidly understand, and then dismantle the logic and evidence upon which their opponent’s argument rests.

ACTIVITY – INTRODUCTION TO CLASH

This activity introduces clash and direct refutation skills. It makes a good lead in to an introductory lesson about clash. Students give short opposing speeches in front of the class and you point out where the arguments clashed and where they didn't.

Time Allotment

20-30 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to the concept of direct refutation.
- be introduced to argument structure and logic.

Method

Divide the class in groups and give each group a proposition to debate. Have them take out a piece of paper and draw a line from top to bottom down the middle. On the top of the left-hand side, students should write “affirmative.” On the top of the right-hand side, they should write “negative.” Give the students five minutes to come up with and write down as many arguments as they can for both sides of the argument, writing arguments in the appropriate column.

After students have brainstormed arguments on either side of the resolution, it will be time for speeches. Either ask for a volunteer or select a student to argue in favor of the proposition and another to argue against it. Depending on the amount of time available and the comfort students have with public speaking, the speeches should be between two to four minutes. Have a student volunteer to flow the speeches on the chalk board, or flow the speeches yourself.

After the speeches have been given, it is time for a group discussion about clash. Most likely, students will have listed arguments for their position, not directly refuting their opponent's arguments. During the group discussion, you can point out where the arguments clashed and where they did not. Use the black board flow when appropriate to point out the relationship between arguments.

This activity works best when you prepare a short lesson on clash, the importance of direct refutation in debate, and the practice of line-by-line refutation, in advance and use this activity as a lead into that lesson.

This activity can be altered by:

- allowing each group of students to develop their own proposition (topic) to debate.
- using as an activity to practice direct refutation skills, asking students in advance to directly refute the arguments presented by the affirmative speaker.
- using the activity to focus explicitly on line-by-line refutation, asking students from the outset to practice line-by-line skills and giving the negative speaker some preparation time after the affirmative speech to prepare direct responses to each affirmative point.

ACTIVITY – JUDGE THE CHALKBOARD

This activity builds advanced argumentation and analytical skills. Students are presented with the flow of a debate about an issue and encouraged to think like a judge and come up with a rationale for who won the debate. It is a good introduction for students to think strategically about making and answering off-case arguments, and for thinking about how you win a judge’s approval.

Time Allotment

20-30 Minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- analyze a debate from the judge’s perspective in order to improve strategic decision-making
- begin to understand the importance of persuasion and clear argumentation in debate
- understand the importance of line-by-line argumentation.

Materials and Preparation

In preparation for this activity, you will need a flow of mini-debate on a particular issue (or a flow of one issue from a debate round).

Method

Using a flow of a mini-debate or a single argument in a debate (such as a disadvantage, critique, or topicality violation), flow the arguments of the entire debate on the chalkboard before the activity begins.

Have the students read over the flow, then, on a scratch piece of paper, have each student write down which team they think won each individual argument on the flow, and why. When they have finished, have students decide who they think won the entire argument, and which of the individual arguments were most important in winning it.

When they have finished, have a few students present their decisions on who won the arguments and why. Then, have the class discuss and debate the differences in student judgments. Have the students think about how each team could have made different strategic decisions that may have changed the outcome of the debate.

The students should leave with an appreciation of how difficult a judge’s position is, and how important it is for them to “make the judge’s job easy.”

ACTIVITY – NONSENSE WORD DEFINITIONS

The key to playing this game well is assuming persuasive authority while spouting complete baloney. Primarily it teaches players to trust and go with their imagination whilst having fun. This is a 'no fail' game. Whatever you say, is right!

Timing

15-20 minutes

Objectives

- Develop impromptu speaking skills
- Develop confidence, creative thinking, and fluency while speaking

Materials

Nonsense words. Print the number you need (1 per person)

Method

To play, you need a group of 5 or more. Sit your players in a circle and give each a nonsense word. Nominate a player to begin. They then give their nonsense word to their right-hand neighbor who must provide a plausible definition for it. When they have completed their definition they continue by giving their nonsense word to the next player on their right.

To encourage inventiveness and creativity, ask for the history of the word and its country of origin, whether it is a noun, verb, adjective etc, what it means and an example of it in use.

Example: 'wodget', noun. This word means a male teenage gremlin. It's derived from 'widget' which denotes a boy baby gremlin. Its origin lies in aviation history where a gremlin meant a mischievous creature that sabotaged aircraft. The word 'widget' was popularized by writer Roald Dahl (Royal Air Force pilot, World War 2) in his best selling children's book 'The Gremlins'. As a widget gets older, it goes through the typical turbulence associated with teenage years. During this period of upset prior to attaining full adult gremlin status, a widget is called a wodget.

Understandably, wodgets in aircraft are more feared than widgets. A wodget in the wings is no laughing matter!

Variation

Once your group is comfortable with the game, have them make up their own nonsense words.