

The Heated Debate

Summary

This is a simulation of a heated debate between secular and religious leaders. Students engage in role-play dealing with issues such as migration, gender equality and gay rights. The teacher assigns roles and moderates the discussion. Difficult topics are explored in the spirit of a democratic debate. The point is to bring out different voices, not to pick a winner. Extra caution is needed to protect students from vulnerable groups.

Description of the activity

1. Explain to the class that you are going to have a role-play. Stress that the actors become different persons and should be regarded as such.
2. Set ground rules for the activity. It is a good idea to have them displayed.
 - Listen to each other and take turns.
 - Keep your voice down.
 - Be respectful
 - Use appropriate language
 - Remember this is just a game
3. Make the students arrange the classroom, forming audience and stage. Put five chairs on the stage.
4. If the energy of the class is low, initiate a short warm-up. For example, have five students on the stage facing the audience. They act as stars on the red carpet, waving at the audience and making a deep bow. The others cheer for them. Switch the group a few times, until everyone passes through the stage.
5. Using the provided role cards, assign roles to six students. You can have volunteers or pick them yourself. Choose a girl to be *the delegate* and a boy to play *the vicar*. Try to distribute the roles so that they are unfamiliar to the players. For example, have a shy student be *the commander*.
6. Have the four lead characters (*commander, delegate, cleric, vicar*) take their seats on the stage. The other two characters join the audience.
7. Remind the class that from now on, everyone plays a role - including the audience members. Your role is the moderator.
8. Explain that there will be 3 rounds of debate and a closure. In each round a new question and a new task will be introduced. Tell the class that you can stop the action at any point and ask them for input.
9. Introduce the participants of the discussion and announce the beginning of round one.



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10. ROUND ONE

- ➔ Task: Be bold and assertive.
- ➔ Question: There is a new wave of migrants seeking refuge in our country. What shall we do?

Have each of the participants address the question. Point out if someone is acting out of character and help them.

11. Bring in the *radical* character. Have him pose his question and let the others respond.

12. ROUND TWO

- ➔ Task: Listen carefully to the others. If their arguments are convincing, let them influence you.
- ➔ Question: Is gender equality a good thing? What about gay marriage?

13. Bring in the *peacenik* character. Have him pose his question.

14. ROUND THREE

- ➔ Task: Seek cooperation and agreement.
- ➔ Question: How can we live peacefully together?

15. Thank the participants and initiate a de-roling.

16. Facilitate a whole-group reflection. Make sure that every participant is given a chance to express his/her thoughts and feelings without speaking about the others.

TIPS:

- ✓ Freeze the action and intervene if the emotional intensity of the simulation becomes too high.
- ✓ If a student playing a role is stuck, ask the class to give him some ideas. If he wants to leave the stage, ask someone else to take his place.
- ✓ Make sure to check in with students who seem upset at the end of the activity.
- ✓ If any of the contents of the script or the character cards seem inappropriate for your classroom, feel free to edit them.

Activity structure

- **Preferred premises of the activity:** in class.
- **Resources needed:** character cards.
- **Recommended number of people participating:** 12-50.
- **Previous knowledge of participants necessary:** basic familiarity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Activity duration:** 90 minutes.





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Learning Objectives

Students learn how to listen to and engage with opposing beliefs. They develop effective communication, negotiation and persuasion skills. The activity fosters perspective taking, critical thinking and appreciation for diversity.

Expected Outcomes

Student awareness of contested societal issues will be increased. They will learn to engage in a constructive dialogue with opponents and to understand their views, while seeking the best possible outcome for their position.

Target group

Students of 14-18 years of age.

Subject of the curriculum in which the activity could be implemented

Social studies
Philosophy
History

Learning objects to be used with this activity

Role-play character cards set (see next page).



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Commander

- You don't like others to tell you what to do.
- You mistrust foreigners. Migrants are a threat to national security.
- You must maintain order by all means necessary.

Delegate

- You are determined to make others listen.
- You are committed to fighting discrimination.
- You believe in international friendship and cooperation.

Cleric

- You want to be a force of good and help others be their best selves.
- You believe in hospitality and helping others in distress.
- You are opposed to gay marriage.

Vicar

- You are a true champion of your people. You want them to be treated with respect.
- You promote peace and reconciliation.
- You are opposed to gender equality.

Radical

- Commander, all these migrants and religious fanatics are dangerous. I want you to order them out of the country RIGHT NOW!

Peacenik

- Violence and animosity has never done us any good. I want to hear from each one of you, what can you do to make this world a better place.