This activity allows students to practice classic debate skills (presenting your own argument and questioning your opponent’s argument), without the stress and time required for a full class debate. Students work in pairs, and argue with one another, rather than standing up in front of a larger audience. The arguments are presented quickly and simply, so the activity does not take much time.

For a Mini Debate, the class is divided into pairs, and each pair is given a debatable claim. Each student is assigned an opposing position: Claim A or Claim B. Both students use the activity sheet to outline a complete argument, with evidence and reasoning.

When both students are ready, they take turns delivering their arguments, within a time limit (2 minutes is typical). When Student A is speaking, Student B listens and take notes on the activity sheet. When Student A finishes, Student B asks questions designed to challenge Student A’s argument. Student A responds to each question. Then the process is repeated, with Student B presenting and Student A questioning.

An alternate way to implement Mini Debates is to divide students into groups of three and assign each a role: Claim A, Claim B, and Judge. The Judge will observe the other two students debating, evaluate each using a judge rubric, and declare a winner who most persuaded him/her. Teachers can then have students switch roles within their groups, and complete the Mini Debate two more times, such that each student has had an opportunity to debate Claim A, Claim B, and serve as Judge.

Mini Debates are a good way to introduce students to the oppositional and competitive nature of debate, in a format that allows them to practice presenting and questioning. If students have participated in several Mini Debates, it will help prepare them well for a Full Debate.

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| **Step** | **Teacher Move** | **Student Move** |
| **1** | Write a claim on a note card and an opposing claim on another note card. Repeat as desired for as many statements as you want students to debate. |  |
| **2** | Divide the class into pairs and instruct each pair to... | Designate one person “person A” and another “person B.”  |
| **3** | Give each pair of students 2 cards. Student A gets the original claim, and student B gets the opposing claim.  |  |
| **4** | Give students directions and a time limit for preparing their arguments. | Prepare a complete argument, using the claim you have been given, and the activity sheet.  |
| **5** | Set a timer for 2 minutes and give the signal for A to begin speaking | Student A presents argument; student B listens and takes notes.  |
| **6** | Set a timer for questioning (adjust time as necessary). | B asks A questions; A responds.  |
| **7** | Set timer for 2 minutes and signal pairs to wrap up questioning and begin student B’s presentation.  | Repeat steps 5-6 with student B presenting and student A listening and questioning. |
| **8** | Give students to reflect on what they learned from the process. It might be a good idea to form different pairs for this part of the process.  | Fill in the activity sheet “What I learned from engaging in this debate was…”  |