**Why Committee Debates?:** Many teachers insist on being the judge of their debates. I always favor having student judges be the committee. I also rarely am selective about the students I choose for the committee. After doing debates many times and focusing a lot of time and energy on the judging, I finally realized that as a teacher, I am not very invested in the judging outcomes of the debate. My educational goals are not around accurately selecting a winner, so it is a waste of my time and energy to act as the judge. Students also learn from and are engaged in the debate regardless of whether their judges make the "right" decision in judging, so it is not important that I have the "best" judges. It was only important that every student have a role by which I could judge them and that the committee roles were clear. When I, the teacher, judged debates, I spent the whole class period furiously taking notes and trying to determine the winner. When the committee judges, I'm freed up from note-taking and verdict and can instead focus my full attention on my real educational objectives: evaluating individual students on their performance in the debate. I can really review each students work and write real-time detailed feedback for each student while still having time to give necessary guidance to the committee when they forget things or go off course. I'm also free to move around the room to redirect or help individual students or deal with discipline or distractions because I am no longer the judge. This is particularly useful in classes that need more guidance or feedback.

**Committee Instructions:** The committee is always the first group I meet with once groups have been assigned. In the video I let the committee make a lot of choices about how the debate should run, but in a different class, I might set more of the rules ahead of time and limit their power. It's very important that the committee members each be responsible for writing and submitting questions for the debate to hold them to the same research and preparation assignment as everyone else. It's also important that they handle other tasks. One instruction I forgot to give to the committee in this class was to make sure that the questions they asked were friendly and useful. When I fail to do this, committees can end up asking "quiz" questions that test students' knowledge of their part of speech but don't at all help them to judge the debate. I have to remind them that their questions need to be helpful to them in making a decision and should be friendly even if they're difficult questions. I usually say to think of it as "think what do I need you to answer in order for me to vote for you?" rather than "what difficult questions can I trick or trap you on?".

**Question and Answer Time:** Many teachers who do committee debates assign particular groups to attack particular other groups and assign this ahead of time. I don't do this because I think it makes the debate stilted and also limits what each group needs to prepare for. I like all groups to have to learn about all other groups and to prepare attacks and defenses for all of them. This also makes the attack and defense time more exciting and authentic because attackers get to attack whomever they have the best attacks for rather than whomever they're assigned to.  
  
**Prep Time**: This fall when I did my parts of speech debate, I gave students only one 47 minute period of preparation time before the debate. I made this choice because it was appropriate to my students and the topic and the sequence of lessons. Since this was an exam school, I knew I could expect high attendance throughout the activity days and could reasonably expect most students to communicate with each other and do work outside of the classroom. With other classes I have taught, I have allocated much more time for prep if I felt that my students needed to complete everything in class or that attendance issues made the extra days helpful in getting everyone on board. One caution, though: I think teachers, as a whole, have a tendency to want to devote too much time to prepping debates because they are afraid that students won't be ready if they don't. Particularly in a first debate, I do think that less is often more. Prep work is really boring and really abstract. Students don't really know what to do with prep time until they have already debated and seen the consequences of lack of preparation. I would always rather throw students into a debate when they aren't quite ready rather than killing interest in the activity by belaboring it with lengthy prep. Focus more time and energy on debriefing the debate in the follow up than on prep work since it is only then that the activity has meaning.

**Follow Up Assignment:** I like to debrief the debates by first getting students' reactions and then getting them to write or brainstorm what strategies or argument styles they saw work and not work in the debate. I like to collect these responses and then have the students review them before they do their next class debate. This only really works, though, if students can collect their thoughts immediately after a debate since they quickly forget this information. This also is a great time to clear up questions and misconceptions that came up during the debate. At times when there were a lot of misconceptions, I've even made this a game the next day of presenting quoted "evidence" from the debate on the overhead and asking students to guess which were or were not correct. This debunking game really helps because after debating it, students are much more curious about the truth of the subject matter. Other helpful follow up activities include writing extensions expressing what students' new beliefs are after hearing the arguments; speech redo assignments where students get a last shot to prove their side really was right; and middle ground writing where they are asked to write an opinion that brings together several of the arguments rather than picking one.   
  
**Resources:** In preparing and presenting material I had the students utilize technology because that is something both available and allowed in my school. I have taught this lesson many times without those resources and the differences were that I had students use a group folder which held all of the prep work for each group and that stayed in the classroom. This allowed group members to all share the same information and to have a copy of speeches and questions for group members to use in case one of their members was absent. This also allowed the whole group to see if any of the pieces was missing. If at all possible, it is really helpful to be able to have students give you an extra copy of their work to look at while they are speaking because then you can grade them on their content and prep work and offer feedback during the debate rather than saving all of the grading work to be done after the fact. If online resources are an option, using something like Edmodo.com (available for free to all BPS teachers) allows students to share their work in small groups and to the whole class, and it also allows the teacher to view and grade work while the student is speaking.