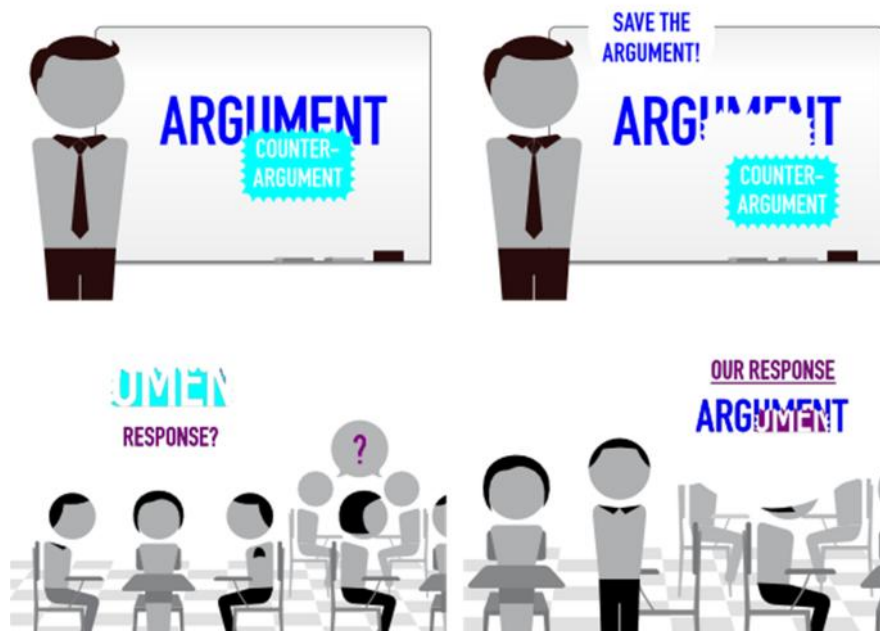


Defeating Counterarguments Class Challenge



Students are put into groups of three and the whole class is given an argument that they must defend along with a counterargument. The groups have three minutes to come up with the best response to the counterargument that they can muster, and then each group has a representative stand and deliver the response. Briefly, the class can discuss which response to the counterargument they found strongest and why. The process repeats as many times as desired with new arguments and counterarguments and different students representing each group. This activity places everyone in the class on the same side of an argument but then has them compete in groups to see who can defend that argument most convincingly. It thus combines what is best about both competition and cooperation.

As with other EBA activities, the oral and written aspects of this one can strengthen and inform one another in more than one way. The Class Challenge could act as an introduction to an essay assignment in which students must anticipate and refute a counterargument to their thesis on a text. Alternatively, students could first draft such an essay, then perform the Challenge to compare their handiwork with that of their peers, and finally revise the essays to reflect the feedback they received during the Challenge.

As it is described here, the lesson focuses on how to respond effectively to counterarguments. It could be adapted, however, to hone any number of argumentation skills. Groups could compete to incorporate textual evidence most smoothly into their arguments, use the greatest variety of warrants to support their claims, organize their arguments most clearly, and so on. Of course, content could be privileged over argumentation skills at any time; for instance, students might be graded on how well they understand the benefits and limitations of primary sources rather than on how persuasively they argue that letters are more effective than journal entries.



Step	Teacher Move	Student Move
1	Lead a discussion in which the class generates both a claim to be defended and a counterargument to that claim. (Or, if time is a more pressing issue than buy-in, just provide the class with the claim and/or counterargument.)	
2	Divide the class into groups of 3–5 students.	
3	Set a timer for three minutes. While it runs, monitor students to make sure they are on task.	Take three minutes to draft a one-minute speech refuting the counterargument and defending the claim. Select a representative who will deliver your speech.
4	Set a timer for one minute. While it runs, have one group’s representative...	Take one minute to deliver your speech while the rest of the class listens.
5	Repeat step 4 until all groups have shared.	Repeat step 4 until all groups have shared.
6	Lead a discussion in which students...	Discuss which group’s speech was the strongest and why.
7	Repeat steps 2–6 as desired.	Repeat steps 2-6 as required.