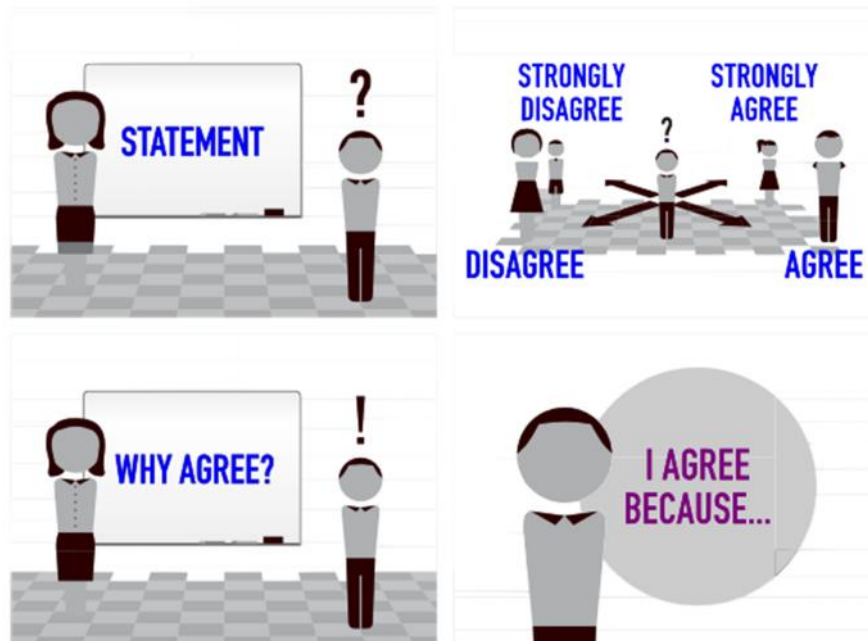


Four Corners



In this activity, each corner of a classroom is labeled with a sign: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” The teacher presents a controversial statement, and each student moves to the corner with the sign that best represents her views on the statement. Once in their corners, students present arguments to defend their positions. Four Corners lessons introduce an element of physical activity into EBA and ensure that every student, even when not speaking, expresses a definite opinion on the topic at hand.

The activity has many uses. It can be an introduction to a unit’s themes or essential questions. For example, a history teacher might use claims like “the government should provide for the basic needs of its citizens” to begin a unit on the Great Depression. Four Corners can also be used to teach or reinforce basic content, as in a class whose students argue whether “the TVA was crucial for growing the southern economy.” The activity may also appear at the end of a unit; a teacher might have a set of five claims ready, each stating that a different battle was most important to the outcome of a war.

How students are asked to defend their positions will depend on the activity’s purpose. If basic argumentation is the goal, each student might be required to say “My claim is...” and “My warrant for this claim is...” When arguing about a text, every student might need to cite one piece of evidence from that text, and in such cases they might need several minutes to find that evidence before moving to their corners. The most advanced classes can involve more complex arguments—multiple warrants for each claim, perhaps, or the refutation of counterarguments. At any level, Four Corners lessons can be used to set up writing activities like Mini Paragraph Writing or Defeating the Critic.

Finally, the teacher can modify the activity to suit the needs of a particular classroom. For example, students in crowded rooms might use hand signals or color-coded cards to communicate rather than moving around the room. The amount of collaboration involved may also vary: some teachers might wish to have students talk with the others in their corner to compare reasoning or formulate a coherent statement before sharing.

Step	Teacher Move	Student Move
1	Make four signs: (1) STRONGLY AGREE, (2) AGREE, (3) DISAGREE, (4) STRONGLY DISAGREE. Post one in each corner of the classroom.	
2	Prepare a list of controversial statements—usually between 4 and 7.	
3	Read one of the statements. Optionally, show the statement on a projector or piece of paper as well.	Move to the corner with the sign that best represents your views on the statement. Standing in the center of the room or in the middle of a wall is not allowed. If using text, take time to find evidence supporting your beliefs before moving to a corner.
4	If you want, give each group time to talk and select their strongest arguments. Then call on a student to share. Repeat as desired.	Defend your position (if called on) and listen (if not).
5	Invite students to change positions if a speaker convinces them to do so.	Change positions if desired.
6	Repeat steps 3–5 for each statement.	Repeat steps 3–5 as required.