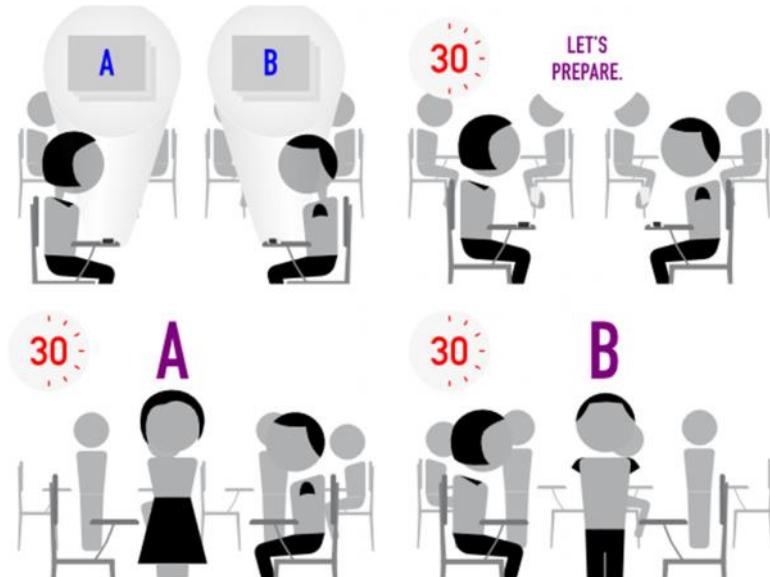


Table Debates



This activity has students thinking quickly to defend positions they have not had time to prepare. The class is divided into groups of 2, and each group is given two stacks of note cards. The cards in each stack are numbered such that card 1 in stack A corresponds to card 1 in stack B. Each corresponding pair provides opposing claims about the same subject: for example, card 1 in stack A might say that “Booker T. Washington was more influential than W.E.B. DuBois” while card 1 in stack B reads “W.E.B. DuBois was more influential than Booker T. Washington.” When a student draws a card, he must immediately defend its claim in a 60-second speech. This goes on simultaneously in each group of students. Once both sides of a controversy have been argued (perhaps including a rebuttal speech from each debater), students begin again with the next set of opposing statements.

Table debates are a quick and efficient way to activate prior knowledge and stimulate interest on a variety of related topics. They are thus particularly useful as introductions to new units of study. A humanities or social studies class preparing for a unit on the U.S. Constitution as it relates to students’ rights in schools, for example, might discuss claims about freedom of speech, religion, and expression in schools.

In one variant of this activity, students compare the strength of various warrants rather than arguing against any given claim. In this case, card 1 in stack A might say “Booker T. Washington was more influential because he was less revolutionary and hence attracted more followers,” while card 1 in stack B reads “Booker T. Washington was more influential because his lived experiences were closer to those of most black people.” Students would then debate about which card more effectively supports the pro-Booker T. Washington stance. Such an activity



would look much like a two-sided version of three-sided Choosing the Best Warrant Mini Debates except that the former would use note cards as prompts instead of a graphic organizer.

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	Place the cards in two stacks such that the top card in one stack rebuts the top card in the other, the second card in each stack rebuts the second card in the other, and so on.	
3	Duplicate the two stacks, until there are enough copies so that each group of students can have two competing stacks.	
4	Divide the class into groups of 2 and instruct each group to...	Designate one person in your group “person A” and another “person B.” [Each small group should follow the next steps at the same time.]
5	Give a set (two competing stacks) of note cards to each group and ask them to...	Make sure stack A (or one of the stacks, if they are not labeled) is face down in front of person A and that stack B (or the other stack, if stacks are not labeled) is face down in front of person B.
6	Give a signal for...	A and B (each): draw the top card in your stack and look at what is written on it.
7	Optionally, set a timer for 30 seconds of prep time to ensure that all students have time to process the task at hand before beginning it.	A and B, if prep time is given: prepare to defend the statement on your card in a 30-second speech.
8	Set a timer for 30 seconds. While it runs, monitor the class to make sure	A: stand and defend your prompt in a 30-second speech. B: listen and prepare to



	each group is on task.	defend your prompt (rebut A's).
9	Set a timer for 30 seconds. While it runs, monitor the class to make sure each group is on task.	B: stand and defend your prompt (rebut A's) in a 30-second speech. A: listen and, if required, prepare for a rebuttal.
10	Optionally, repeat steps 8–9 to give students a chance to...	A and B: respond to your opponents' arguments and elaborate on your own in further 30-second speeches if required.
11	Optionally, lead a whole-class discussion in which students...	Explain which side won the debate in your group and why. Talk about arguments rather than about the people who made them.
12	Repeat steps 6–11 as desired.	Repeat steps 6–11 as required.