Free Speech Essentials: Critical Debates

Students grapple with free speech-related conflicts and controversies using real-life scenarios; they deepen their understanding by taking a position and supporting their arguments with evidence from a gallery of print and visual sources.

**GRADES:** 7-12 and college

**DURATION:** 30-60 minutes

**MATERIALS:**

* Handouts: Selected Critical Debate case study (download, one per student), Organizing Evidence and Presenting Your Position worksheets (one each per small group, included in this packet)
* Background for selected Critical Debate (download)
* Sources for evidence: Access to the online artifact gallery of print and visual sources for your selected critical debate topic

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Select a Critical Debate from the [Free Speech Essentials EDCollection](file:///%5C%5Cemcnas.freedomforum.org%5CD-Education%5CCurriculum%5CNED.org%5CCurriculum%5CFree%20Speech%20EDCollection%5CPreview%20Case%20Studies%20for%20BP%5CnewseumED.org%5Cfree-speech-essentials) [newseumED.org/free-speech-essentials]. Review the case study and the corresponding background information.
2. Distribute copies of the debate case study to your students. Do NOT reveal the background to your students until after they have completed their debate. Read the scenario as a class and discuss it to make sure that students understand what the controversy is and why it has arisen.
3. Break the class into small groups and either assign or allow them to pick a debate position. Give each group a copy of the Organizing Evidence worksheet and allow approximately 30 minutes for the groups to complete it by coming up with their arguments and looking at the online artifact gallery of sources (on the Critical Debate webpage) and gather evidence. Be sure to tell your students to look at the captions for the artifacts for clues to what they contain and which positions they might support.
4. Give each group a copy of the Presenting Your Position worksheet and allow approximately 10 minutes for the groups to organize how they will share their arguments; then have each group present to the class.
5. Talk about the various positions and arguments using the questions on the case study to prompt discussion and debate among the groups. Attempt to arrive at a class consensus in support of one position. Questions to guide the debate:
* Which position has the most arguments and evidence to back it up?
* Which arguments do you think are the strongest? Why? (Consider how much evidence backs them up, how likely they are they to persuade someone new to this issue, etc.)
* What would be the immediate and long-term impacts of taking this position?
* How would this position affect the people directly involved in this issue? What precedents would it set for the future or for people beyond this specific situation?
1. Explain what happened in the real-life scenario using the background information and have a wrap-up conversation using the following questions.
* How did the First Amendment play a role in sparking and/or resolving this controversy?
* Which group in your class debate had the strongest arguments? Why?
* Which position won out in real life? Do you agree with this outcome? Do you think it would have the same outcome if similar events took place today? Why or why not?
* What other current or historical issues does this situation remind you of?

**Name: Date:**

Critical Debates: Organizing Evidence

Your case study:

Write a two- or three-sentence summary of the issue you are debating.

Which position are you taking in this debate?

Brainstorm at least three arguments you could make to support this position. In other words, how could you convince other people to support your side?

1.

2.

3.

**Look through the artifact gallery for your case study on NewseumED.org. Find two sources with evidence to support one or more of your arguments and answer the questions below.**

**Source 1**

Title:

What is it? (newspaper, photograph, etc.)

Is this a primary or secondary source, or a combination? Explain.

How does this source support your position? What information or ideas does it provide that can strengthen your arguments?

**Source 2**

Title:

What is it? (newspaper, photograph, etc.)

Is this a primary or secondary source, or a combination? Explain.

How does this source support your position? What information or ideas does it provide that can strengthen your arguments?

**Find one source that could support a different position in your debate and answer the questions below.**

Title:

What is it? (newspaper, photograph, etc.)

Is this a primary or secondary source, or a combination? Explain.

What position does this source support and how?

How could you counter (or argue back against) the evidence in this source to defend your own position?

**Name: Date:**

Critical Debates: Presenting Your Position

Your case study:

Your position:

Using your initial brainstorming and the evidence you’ve gathered, prepare three polished arguments that you think will persuade other people to support your position. **At least two** of your arguments should be supported by evidence from the artifact gallery of sources.

**Argument 1**

Do you have evidence from the artifact gallery to support this argument? If yes, answer the questions below. If no, skip to the next argument.

Evidence (supporting information and source where you found it):

How it supports your argument:

**Argument 2**

Do you have evidence from the artifact gallery to support this argument? If yes, answer the questions below. If no, skip to the next argument.

Evidence (supporting information and source where you found it):

How it supports your argument:

**Argument 3**

Do you have evidence from the artifact gallery to support this argument? If yes, answer the questions below. If no, skip to the next argument.

Evidence (supporting information and source where you found it):

How it supports your argument:

How will you present your position to the class? Will you open with your strongest argument, or will you save it for last? Who will present each argument? Which evidence will you cite or share with the class? Use the chart below to plan your presentation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Argument 1** |  |
| Presented by |  |
| Evidence |  |
| **Argument 2** |  |
| Presented by |  |
| Evidence |  |
| **Argument 3** |  |
| Presented by |  |
| Evidence |  |

**WORKSHEET EXAMPLE**

Critical Debates: Organizing Evidence

**Write a two- or three-sentence summary of the issue you are debating.**

*Leaders of the newly formed United States are trying to decide whether they need to have a formal document to protect individual rights. Some people think this is necessary to make sure the government doesn’t abuse its power, but other people think it’s more important to just have a good constitution.*

**Which position are you taking in this debate?**

*The proposed Constitution is already set up to protect these rights, so we don’t need to add anything else to it before we approve it.*

**Brainstorm at least three arguments you could make to support this position. In other words, how could you convince other people to support your side?**

1. *Our new government is a monarchy, not a democracy. The people will have the power.*

2. *It’s more important to get the Constitution approved and strengthen our country than argue over details.*

3. *We can always add protections for our rights later, once we have a sturdy government in place.*

**Look through the artifact gallery for your case study on NewseumED.org. Find two sources with evidence to support one or more of your arguments and answer the questions below.**

**Source 1**

Title: *The Federal Anti-Federalist*

What is it? (newspaper, photograph, etc.) *newspaper article*

Is this a primary or secondary source, or a combination? Explain.

*This is a primary source because it presents one opinion on what’s happening at the time.*

How does this source support your position? What information or ideas does it provide that can strengthen your arguments?

*This article, which is set up as an imaginary conversation, makes a lot of points that support our position. For example, it says that if we don’t pass a constitution soon, we will all be slaves to chaos and we can always go back and add more protections later.*

**WORKSHEET EXAMPLE**

Critical Debates: Presenting Your Position

Your case study: *Founders Debate How to Protect Freedoms*

Your position: *The proposed Constitution already protects these freedoms, and we should go ahead and approve it without adding additional parts about individual freedoms.*

Using your initial brainstorming and the evidence you’ve gathered, prepare three polished arguments that you think will persuade other people to support your position. **At least two** of your arguments should be supported by evidence from the artifact gallery of sources.

**Argument 1**

*Right now, approving the Constitution and strengthening our government is more important than fighting over individual rights.*

Do you have evidence from the artifact gallery to support this argument? If yes, answer the questions below. If no, skip to the next argument.

Evidence (supporting information and source where you found it):

*Without a good Constitution, "the people are slaves to the multitude, and to the chance of an hour." (A quote from The Federal Anti-Federalist dialogue)*

How it supports your argument:

*This quote shows that people at the time of this debate were concerned that their existing government, without the Constitution in place, was not very strong. They were worried that if they didn’t get a better government in place, individual rights would be the least of their worries, because it would be mob rule and just luck whether things went well for the citizens.*