American Resilience Project
Educational Toolkit

Mock Debate Guide

Mock Debates promote active, participatory learning and research, critical thinking, debate, and speech skills. Mock debates work best when teachers/facilitators help students prepare by providing contextual information about the topic and reliable sources for deeper research. Mock debates also work best when distinct positions can be argued: for example, a proposition that one can be for or against, or a social/environmental problem that has two or three clear and competing solutions. Besides Internet and library research on the topic, learning and engagement can be enhanced when students are asked (optional extra credit?) to attend related public events, speakers, city council or legislative hearings, meetings of NGOs, protests, rallies, etc.

For a truly successful Mock Debate lesson, students need adequate time to do research and prepare their arguments in advance. Organizing a practice session for each team is helpful, so they can share their knowledge and identify weaknesses in their arguments. This Nation in Transition Educational Toolkit provides curated sources where students can begin their research. We offer published articles, news reports, and blogs and podcasts from prominent NGOs and government agencies. Additional readings specific to the topic will be necessary, especially to tease out distinct and debatable positions regarding the energy transition. Below are examples of potential topics for debate.

Policy Topic Suggestions:
- Specifically in regard to the film *Nation in Transition:*

    - Should electric utility companies accelerate their retirement of fossil fuel power plants and replace them with clean energy sources; or should utility companies be allowed to produce electric power from whatever sources they deem most effective and affordable?

    - What, if anything, does society owe to coal workers and coal-dependent communities as the nation (and the world) rapidly shifts to cleaner sources of energy? Or: Does society have a social obligation to assist workers and communities facing a loss of jobs and tax revenue caused by efforts to address climate change?

- Electric Vehicles (EVs): if the US government decides it must act boldly to reduce CO2 emissions in our transportation sector, would tax incentives for EVs or emissions reduction requirements for all vehicles offer the most effective route to this goal?
    - Team A: FOR tax incentives to make EV's more affordable as the most effective policy to reduce GHG emissions.

- Team B: FOR corporate fleet emissions requirements forcing automobile manufacturers to increase fuel efficiency standards (to decrease emissions per mile traveled) or pay a fine for non-compliance as the most effective policy to reduce GHG emissions.

- CO_2 emissions Cap-and-Trade policy--a debate on the following hypothetical situation: The federal government puts a national cap on carbon emissions for businesses, which grows more stringent over time to promote continuous progress in reducing CO_2 emissions. Businesses that reduce their emissions more than the target amount can sell their excess allowances (or "credits") to other companies. Those businesses that do not meet the cap can purchase credits from those with an excess.
    - Team A: FOR instituting a national Cap-and-Trade policy
    - Team B: AGAINST instituting a national Cap-and-Trade policy

- Net Metering for rooftop solar: Net metering is a policy in place in many states that provides a financial incentive to homeowners and businesses to install rooftop solar. It requires electric utility companies to pay the owners of rooftop solar the full retail price for any excess energy sent to the grid. Utility companies prefer to buy energy at a wholesale rate and sell it at a higher retail rate, so they generally oppose net metering, arguing that it disadvantages other customers without rooftop solar.
    - Team A: FOR retaining net metering.
    - Team B: FOR phasing out net metering.

- *Feel free to use policies actively being debated in your state and community or others not listed above.*

Format and Agenda
The suggested format below follows the Role-Play debate format. If you are more familiar with other forms of debate (Lincoln-Douglas, Parliamentary, National Debate Tournament Rules, etc...) feel free to modify to best fit your classroom.

1. Team A Presentation
    a. Team A (for the proposal) may either:
        i. Appoint a spokesperson. The spokesperson has 5 minutes to present the proposal and the reasons for supporting the policy.
        ii. Speak individually. Each individual in Team A has 3 minutes to present their reasons for supporting the policy. The first person may have an extra minute to introduce the policy. Each team should decide what each member of the team will focus on in their presentation to have the most effective and cohesive argument.

2. Team B Presentation
    a. Team B (against the proposal) may either:
        i. Appoint a spokesperson. The spokesperson has 5 minutes to present the proposal and the reasons for opposing the policy.

ii. Speak individually. Each individual in Team B has 3 minutes to present their reasons for opposing the policy. The first person may have an extra minute to introduce the policy. Each team should decide what each member of the team will focus on in the presentation to have the most effective and cohesive argument.

3. Rebuttal Cycle 1
   a. Team A has 2 minutes to offer a rebuttal to **one** of Team B's arguments
      i. Team B has 1 minute to counter
   b. Team B has 2 minutes to offer a rebuttal to **one** of Team A's arguments
      i. Team A has 1 minute to counter

4. Rebuttal Cycle 2
   a. Team A has 2 minutes to offer a rebuttal to **one** of Team B's arguments
      i. Team B has 1 minute to counter
   b. Team B has 2 minutes to offer a rebuttal to **one** of Team A's arguments
      i. Team A has 1 minute to counter

5. Audience Participation
   Optional pending size of class and if different groups of students will take part in separate debates, thus leaving an 'audience'.
   a. After both Rebuttal Cycles, the audience then has the opportunity to ask questions. The length of this section is up to the educator and size of class. The audience may ask any member of the two teams a direct question regarding their argument or direct a question at one of the teams in general.
      Note: Limit answer/counter to ~1 minute

6. Voting and Results
   a. At the end of all speeches, rebuttal cycles, and audience participation, the class may take a vote.

Roles and Participation Suggestions
These roles depend entirely on the debate topic chosen and can be modified as needed according to the topic and size of class.
- Team A (for)
  - 5 - 6 students
- Team B (against)
  - 5 - 6 students
- Audience (rest of class)

Suggestions for Mock Debate Operation
- For Speakers
  - Prepare short speeches using evidence and examples to present during initial speaking time.

- Be ready with additional information to draw on during rebuttals and counters. To fully prepare, students should be aware of likely arguments from either side.
- Be aware of timing and stick to allotted time for each speech. The educator may decide to use an audible or visible timer to keep students on track if desired.
- For the Audience Members
    - Take notes during all arguments and presentations.
    - Final decision must be based on evidence brought forward during the presentation and rebuttal cycles.
    - Present your vote on whether to adopt or reject the proposal.

Town Hall Meeting Rules
- One voice at a time
- State position clearly when speaking
- Respect everyone's opinion and time