

Debate on a Constitutional Topic

The language of democracy is the language of debate. Good argumentation can provide citizens with an improved ability to make critical choices. In this activity, you will argue one side of an issue related to our Constitution with one or more students in class.

You and/or your team must include the following in your debate (60 pts):

- ❑ A clearly stated thesis, or point of view, on a Constitutional issue; (10 pts)
- ❑ At least 2 reasons to support your viewpoint, presented clearly and in a logical order; (20 pts)
- ❑ Relevant examples and facts to support your reasons; (20 pts)
- ❑ Responses (rebuttals or refutations) to arguments made by opponent(s). (10 pts)

Criteria for an effective debate (10 pts):

- ❑ The issue should have no clear answer – it must be debatable.
- ❑ The issue should be important.
- ❑ The issue should be one that you, your team & your opponents care to debate.

Things to Consider:

- ❑ Each person on your team must present his/her own arguments/rebuttals*. (25 pts)
- ❑ The more examples, facts & evidence you present, the more persuasive you will be.
- ❑ You do not necessarily have to debate the position you believe in.
- ❑ Use your tone of voice, gestures and overall enthusiasm to help you convince. (5 pts)
- ❑ If you only spend an hour working on this project, your grade will reflect that.

This work is to be completed both in school and at home. It will be considered a performance assessment, part of your 2nd quarter grade. You will have internet access for at least 3 days in order to *research information in support of your topic.

Attach this sheet to your *research/notes with **a staple** when your debate is over.

Arrange ***in advance*** the day you plan to present your debate, beginning on Thursday, December 9th through Wednesday, December 15st.

Student's name _____ Period _____

Final Grade for Debate _____

CONSTITUTIONAL TOPIC DEBATE

Suggested procedure:

1. Day 1: Decide if you want to debate by yourself against one other person, or form a team of no more than three against another 3-person team. (Teams may not be larger than 3 because most issues cannot adequately support more than 3 good reasons.)
2. Day 1: Explore one or more issues from your own background knowledge or from one of the topics below. Do some early research on a topic to see if it will work. If it's too hard to find information/reasons/support for your issue, explore others before choosing a final one.
3. Day 2: Finalize one topic with your team and opponents at least one week before presenting.
4. Day 2: Brainstorm reasons, on your own and then with your partner(s).
5. Day 2-4: Research evidence to support your side of the issue: facts, examples, statistics, anecdotes
6. Day 5: Research arguments for the opposing side so you can find ways to refute them.
7. Day 6-7: Arrange your arguments logically – the most effective way is to present your strongest argument last, 2nd strongest first, and any weaker arguments in between. Do this with your partner(s).
8. Day 8: Practice your presentation, with or without your partner, before presenting, making adjustments as needed.
9. Day 9: Present

Possible Constitutional Debate Topics:

Bill of Rights: Should the Bill of Rights be expanded to include rights not seen by the Founders?

Should any rights be taken out – “right to bear arms” for instance? Is Amendment 3 still necessary – lodging troops in private homes? Should it include rights listed by the International Declaration? Should ALL people on US soil be allowed these rights, regardless of whether they are citizens or not?

Federalists/ Anti-federalists: What should be more powerful: national or state governments? Why? What is the best way to protect citizens' individual rights? How well has republican government worked in the USA? Who were some Framers on each side of these issues?

Executive Branch: How should the President be selected: by the Electoral college or by popular vote?

Should the electoral college be eliminated? How will people in large and small states be affected by each method? What advantages and disadvantages did each method have in America 200 years ago? What about today? **Powers:** Is the President too powerful? How much power should the executive branch have? Is the President usurping power from Congress (war declaration, executive orders replacing law-making, etc.) Should the size of the Cabinet and/or Executive departments be decreased?

Legislative Branch: Should we put term limits on Congress (make it so representatives can only serve 1-2 terms of office)? Should lobbyists be prohibited from the halls of Congress? Should there be limits on the length of election “season”? How much should Congress be allowed to stretch the “elastic clause” with its lawmaking powers? How much is *necessary and proper*?

General: Should Congress, the Supreme Court and/or the President be allowed to vote themselves raises (or any other benefits) without consulting the People? Should any government official be entitled to privileges not available to the People (exemption from income taxes, universal health care, publicly paid transportation, generous retirement benefits, etc.)? Should political parties be banned? Are there any laws currently in use that might be considered unconstitutional? Should the 14th Amendment be repealed as some Tea Partiers suggest? Should people be allowed to protest at funerals or other personal/family gatherings (1st Amendment)?

Helpful websites:

<http://www.procon.org/>

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>

<http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org/>

<http://www.usconstitution.net/>

<http://www.multcolib.org/homework/sochc.html>