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Controversial Issues

Subject: [Mix It Up](#)

Students always have passionate opinions about controversial social topics. They also often become friends with others who reinforce their ideology. And students don't often possess the skills to disagree gracefully. This activity invites students to cross their ideological boundaries and become friends with others who think differently than they do.

Objectives

- Students will debate a controversial topic with grace and dignity
- Students will practice disagreeing by using the "Disagree with Grace" statements
- Students will make friends across ideological boundaries

Time and Materials

- One class session
- Controversial Topics Handout for each student
- Teacher first reads "[What Do We Say When We Hear 'Faggot'?](#)"

Explain to students that they're going to be discussing a controversial topic in class. Content specialists can use whatever topic is controversial in their field (i.e. evolution vs. intelligent design for science; the discovery of America by Columbus vs. the invasion of the Americas by Columbus for history). The model we're providing is on the common, everyday put-down, "You're so gay!" Any controversial topic will do though.

Their goal is to simply not raise their voices, be aggressive, put down others' opinions or be unkind in any way at all. This is a lesson in crossing the social boundaries of ideology. Reinforce the idea that they live in a world of diverse opinions, and that being able to conduct dialogue safely is an important skill.

Next, have them read the Controversial Topic Handout on "You're so gay!" silently for at least five minutes. Remind students that as long as they disagree with grace, the discussion can continue. Specifically, invite them to be mindful of their tone and volume when speaking with classmates. Tell students that they are *not* trying to move people to believe like they do; they're just discussing different opinions gracefully.

Last of all, have students reflect on how they felt during the dialogue. Were they angry? Why or why not? Did they get frustrated? How so? Why is it important to listen to people's opinions that are different from our own? How can "disagreeing with grace" help us during our lives personally and professionally? What is one positive thing I learned from my classmates' different point-of-view?

Extension

As a follow-up, share with your students these articles on school-age children who have recently been killed or taken their own lives because of anti-gay bias in schools.

- [Jaheem Herrera, age 11](#)
- [Carl Walker-Hoover, age 11](#)
- [Lawrence King, age 15](#)

Remind students that the words we use can either give life or death — that's how important they are.

Have students brainstorm a list of other controversial topics that they may want practice with "disagreeing with grace." Have students practice crossing ideological boundaries so that they can see others' points-of-view.

For additional hints on teaching students to talk respectfully about controversial topics, try the website [ProCon](#), which includes lesson plan ideas and glimpses of how other schools are using controversial topics to foster civil debate and build critical thinking skills.

File(s):

 [Controversial Topics Handout](#)

 [Printer-friendly version](#)

You might also like:

- [Gay Children's Books](#)
- [Chapter 4: Teaching Controversy](#)
- [The Philosopher's Stone](#)
- [Put-Ups](#)
- [Elementary Mapping Activity](#)