

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: Agree-Disagree Discussions

Suggested grade/age: 5-12

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: Variable! As few as 15 minutes if discussing a single prompt; as long as 90 minutes, depending on the number of prompts and students' stamina.

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

Objectives: After Agree-Disagree discussions, students will be better able to...

- take a stance on a point of controversy in a text and provide evidence to support that stance
- identify points of controversy in literary and nonfiction texts
- respond to counterarguments with textual evidence
- create oral and written arguments
- think critically about their own stance on an issue in light of others' ideas

Agree-Disagree discussions help students who...

- might be visual or kinesthetic learners
- are reluctant to participate in discussions [preparation beforehand gives these students an “in”; even students who don’t speak still give an opinion based on where they stand]

Best practices of Agree-Disagree discussions include...

- encouraging broad participation
- allowing for student choice
- fostering collaborative learning

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

This lesson can be used at any point in the school year as a way for students to more deeply access a text and build argumentative skills. It works well as a frequent discussion tool; as students do the activity more and more, they gain confidence and skill.

Procedure:

1. As a class or for homework, students should read a common text.
2. Post “Agree” and “Disagree” signs on opposite sides of the classroom.
3. Teacher supplies various Agree-Disagree statements that highlight controversial moments in the text. For example, in “The Weapon” (Frederic Brown), such statements might include...
 - a. It was wrong for Mr. Niemand to give Harry the gun.
 - b. Graham is a good person.
 - c. The author’s use of the word “idiot” is offensive.
 - d. Graham is likely to give up his project.
 - e. “The Weapon” is a well-crafted story.
4. [optional] Students may craft additional A-D statements in small groups; the class may then vote on which statements will be discussed.

5. Give students 10-15 minutes to prepare their arguments (a preparation worksheet that prompts students to find evidence and anticipate counterclaims is useful here).
6. When discussion begins, students stand along the continuum between “Agree” and “Disagree” to show their stances on the statement. Being in the middle is okay!
7. Students discuss the statement, explaining their positions with evidence, working to convince those on the other side of the issue. Students are encouraged to move if a convincing reason is given.
8. Discussion continues until the teacher determines it should end! Then move on to the next statement.

Related Resources:

- Signs posted on opposite sides of the room: “Agree” and “Disagree”
- A text for discussion; “The Weapon” by Frederic Brown works well; any text that contains significant controversy can work well with this activity - I have used it effectively with *Frankenstein*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Beowulf*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *The Great Gatsby*
- Preparation sheet for students to compose their arguments before discussion
- A projector is helpful for displaying the statements, but not necessary

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- Use this activity with fictional or informational texts. Even using no text can work as a pre-reading activity to get students thinking about an issue and activate prior knowledge
- Tally students’ responses as an assessment tool
- Provide sentence-starters for students to encourage clear discussion
- Use the Agree-Disagree discussion as a springboard for a writing assignment

For additional information, contact:

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