

1.6 DIALOGUE VS. DEBATE: PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Essential Question(s): How is dialogue different than debate?

Overview

Technology is enabling students to be increasingly aware of news and current events. Along with this increased awareness, we see more and more students becoming actively engaged in conversations around hot-button topics. While students often talk in digital spaces about current events that concern them, they also continue the conversation in person. When disagreements happen in those conversations, what do our students do? Bret Stephens, a journalist and author, wrote a [piece](#) for *The New York Times* arguing that we no longer know how to disagree with each other. He notes that in order for a democracy to prevail, its occupants must disagree and do so in a productive fashion.

Snapshot

What Students Will Learn:

During this lesson, students will gain skills for engaging in civil discourse while creating brave spaces for themselves, and those around them.

Standard(s):

D2.Civ.7.9-12

Time: 50 minutes



Objectives

- Develop skills for engaging in civil discourse on a debatable topic.
- Cite evidence from an article to inform their position.
- Reflect critically on their performance, and their peers' performance, during the Philosophical Chairs dialogue.

Differentiation

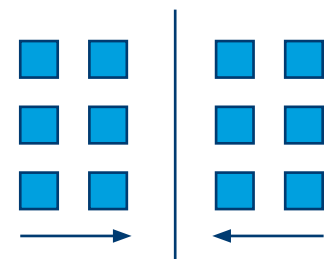
- This lesson uses a Newsela article as its main source of evidence. The article is available in multiple lexile levels so you can differentiate to several reading levels if needed. (You will need to create a FREE Newsela account in order to access other reading levels.)
- For students who want to challenge themselves, you may ask them to switch and defend the opposing viewpoint than they originally picked.
- To help equalize participation, consider dedicating a few minutes after each question is asked to allow students to think about answers. Additionally, consider pairing students together to share with each other before sharing to the large group.

What's Needed

- ☐ Writing utensil
- ☐ WiFi, internet, computer, screen or projector, chart paper and markers
- ☐ Make copies of “[Philosophical Chairs Dialogue Reflection](#),” one for each student.
- ☐ Prepare the rules for a successful Philosophical Chairs dialogue in step #7 to be displayed for whole class viewing. (*Consider keeping as these rules will be reviewed again in other lessons.*)
- ☐ Have students read in advance of doing this lesson, “U.S. wants to peek inside iPhone but Apple holding up the shield of privacy” (Newsela, February 22, 2016, www.adl.org/media/16107/download). Instruct students to bring the article with them to class.

Classroom Setup

For this lesson, it is best to have desks or tables pushed to the sides, or in rows facing each other with space down the center of the rows (see illustration on the right). This allows students to choose a side and speak directly to the opposition during the dialogue.



Key Vocabulary

civil discourse
debate
dialogue



Direct Teaching

1. Remind students about the reading that was assigned as homework (“U.S. wants to peek inside iPhone but Apple holding up the shield of privacy”).
2. Have students complete the following warm-up question by writing a few sentences, having an informal discussion with their neighbor, or having a whole class discussion:
If you have a phone, do you allow others to look at your phone? Why or why not? If you don't have a phone, would you let others look at it? Why or why not?
Have students share out if they have completed a written response.
3. Prompt students to take out the article, “U.S. wants to peek inside iPhone but Apple holding up the shield of privacy” and review the essential questions:
 - How is dialogue different than debate?
 - Under what circumstances, if any, should government officials be allowed to hack an individual's cell phone?
4. Instruct students to take five minutes to review the article. Have them review any notes and questions about the article and topic. Ask them to think about how they *feel* about the issue.
5. Explain to students they will participate in a Philosophical Chairs dialogue. If they have already participated in this type of dialogue, ask them to share what to expect based on their prior experience. If this is your students' first Philosophical Chairs dialogue, explain the following:
A philosophical chairs dialogue is an opportunity for students to think critically, verbally process their ideas and reflect on their beliefs. In a philosophical chairs dialogue, it's important that students practice civil discourse—acknowledging others' perspectives as well as using “I Statements.” While the philosophical chairs may seem like a debate, it is not. It's a form of communicating across differences. A question will be asked, and if you think ‘yes’ or you agree with the statement, stand on the right side of the room. If you think ‘no’ or you disagree with the statement, stand on the left side of the room. From there, we will call on each other to talk about why you agree or disagree. During the dialogue, you can change sides of the room if your opinion on the statement changes.
6. Ask students what rules should be in place to make this Philosophical Chairs dialogue successful.
7. Share these six rules with the class, prepared in advance.

Rules for a successful Philosophical Chairs dialogue

- Ask high level questions with open endings.
- Questions need to relate to the text.
- Acknowledge the person and paraphrase what was said before you.
- Move sides if you feel persuaded.
- Two people should speak before you speak again.
- Be respectful and kind.

Stress the importance of responding to the idea and not the person. For example, “I disagree with the idea that _____,” instead of “I disagree with you.”

8. Conduct the Philosophical Chairs dialogue as follows. Allow 20 minutes for this process.
 - a. Start the dialogue by asking, “Should Apple allow the FBI, and other federal agencies, to hack users’ cell phones? Why or why not?”
 - b. Tell students which side of the room represents “agree” and which side represents “disagree.” Instruct students to stand or sit on the side of the room that matches with their opinion. Then, help students get the dialogue going. (The teacher’s job is to take a back seat and act as a facilitator, intervening if needed. If the dialogue ends around this question, have students ask a new question.)
9. Have students sit down and reflect individually using the “[Philosophical Chairs Dialogue Reflection](#)” handout. Then, bring students together to discuss some of the following questions as a whole class:
 - How did participating in the Philosophical Chairs dialogue feel?
 - What is the difference between a debate and a dialogue? (*A debate is a discussion on a certain topic in which people argue for opposing viewpoints. There is a winner and loser in a debate. In contrast, a dialogue is an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue for the purposes of understanding others’ points of view, moving a topic forward or resolving a problem.*)
 - In what ways is a Philosophical Chairs like a debate? In what ways is it like a dialogue?
 - How does the Philosophical Chairs dialogue connect to our Civics classroom and civil discourse?
10. Have students turn in their reflection handouts. This is also a time for you to check-in with the class to see what their final thoughts are.

Closing

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PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS DIALOGUE REFLECTION

1. What was the topic of the dialogue today? _____
2. What was your original stance on the topic? _____
3. Did you change sides? Why or why not?

4. What went well for you during the dialogue today?

5. What can we work on so the next dialogue is even more successful?

6. Reflect on ONE of the statements listed below.

- a. Based on the Philosophical Chairs, I believe that people can have more open conversations about debatable topics.
- b. Based on the Philosophical Chairs, I believe that people cannot have open conversations about debatable topics.
- c. The Philosophical Chairs made me realize that I do not think about other perspectives often.
- d. The Philosophical Chairs made me realize that I do think about other perspectives often.
