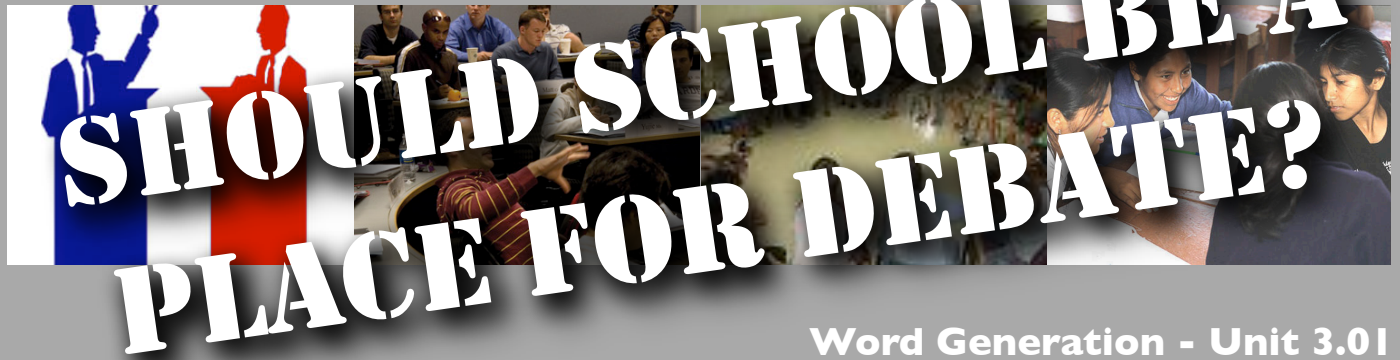


Join the national conversation!



Focus Words

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate



WEEKLY PASSAGE

In room 207, Mr. Smith is teaching his students about the civil rights movement. He asks the students questions such as, “Who were the freedom riders?” or “What year was the Montgomery bus boycott?” It is easy for students to find the answers in their textbooks. Mr. Smith tells the students whether they are right or wrong. On Friday, they will have a quiz about these facts.

In room 209, Ms. Miles is also teaching about the civil rights movement. She asks her students, “Is peaceful protest the best way to make things change for the better?” The students have a **debate**. Some think Martin Luther King was right to tell protesters to avoid violence. Others believe that sometimes violence is necessary when people will not listen to reason. They ask Ms. Miles for the right answer, but she says there is no right answer.

Some people believe that kids in school should only learn about facts. These people think students should get information from their textbooks or teacher and memorize it. That way, some argue, everybody will learn the same things and they can all do well on tests.

Other people think debates can be hard because there are no right answers. Sometimes everybody learns different things from a debate. This makes it hard for teachers to give a test to find out what students have learned. Debates also take a lot of time. Teachers who

have debates may not be able to cover as many topics in class. Then, students may not learn all of the facts in the textbook.

However, debates may help students understand why the facts they learn in school are important. We live in a democracy, where everyone needs to know how to form and **justify** opinions in order to make decisions. Students will not always have a teacher or a textbook to give the right answers, so young people need to learn to think for themselves. Each person has a unique **perspective** defined by his or her knowledge, experience, and attitudes. Even teachers and textbook authors have their own perspectives. Through a classroom debate, students hear their classmates’ opinions. Students justify their opinions with evidence from texts and based on their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own **biases** and understand a problem in a new way. Hearing classmates’ perspectives during a debate can help students understand the complexity of many important issues. Whether it is better to have teachers teach from the text or to have students engage in debates is a continuing **controversy** in education.

What do you think? Should students learn only facts in school? Or should debates be an important part of their education?

Should school be a place for debate?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

debate : (noun) a discussion of a problem where both sides are presented

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

controversy : (noun) a great difference of opinion; an ongoing disagreement

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

perspective : (noun) point of view, way of looking at things

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

justify : (verb) to defend, explain, or show to be right

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

bias : (noun) tendency to prefer or favor one position or side over another

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

Should school be a place for debate?



PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Option 1: In the Urban Debate League, students from city schools **debate controversial** issues. A skillful debater can **justify** more than one **perspective**. For example, a debater might start by arguing that her school should have a dress code. Then, she can change positions and argue that her school should not have a dress code. The debater puts personal **biases** aside.

In April, 2008, debaters met at the national Urban Debate Championships. Four Boston Public School students competed.

They were:

- ▶ a 10th grader from Mattapan
- ▶ a 10th grader from Dorchester
- ▶ a 10th grader from the South End
- ▶ a 12th grader from Charlestown

What percent of the Boston Public School students were in tenth grade?

- A) 25%
- B) $\frac{3}{4}\%$
- C) 55%
- D) 75%

Option 2: Urban Debaters **debate controversial** issues in teams of two. In each debate, a team either argues from an affirmative or negative **perspective**. Teams must be affirmative in some debates, and negative in others. Even if a debater is **biased** toward one opinion, she must skillfully argue both sides. Judges choose the winning team based on how well team members **justify** each perspective.

In a debate round, each of the four debaters talks three times: an 8-minute speech, a 5-minute response, and a 6-minute question period. Gabriel is organizing a school debate. He wants to know how many whole debate rounds can happen in 4 hours if everybody uses all their time. Write an inequality that would help him figure this out. You can let r = the number of debate rounds.

Discussion Question: High school debaters tend to get good grades and go to college. Some people say this is good **justification** for using debate in the classroom. Others have a different, and **controversial**, **perspective**. They say that kids join debate teams because they are already smart and motivated. They say debate won't help regular kids. What do you think?

Should school be a place for debate?



THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

Ms. Lexie Kahn and Mr. Paul E. Seemy are two science teachers who work together. Being science teachers, they encourage their students to be curious and ask a lot of questions. Some of their students like to ask questions about national **controversies**. Others ask questions about experiences that have made them wonder about something.

Ms. Kahn and Mr. Seemy themselves often have different **perspectives**, and they like to debate each other. They try not to let personal **biases** get in the way of exchanging ideas so they try to use evidence to **justify** their opinions.

Both teachers believe that debating develops intelligence just as physical exercise develops muscles. They think that you become smarter by working through challenging problems. Some of their students agree with this, but others do not. The doubtful students seem to believe that people have a fixed amount of intelligence that stays the same no matter what.

→ Mr. Seemy's student Joon found this topic very interesting, so he decided to survey the students at his school.

Joon wants to find out:

Have middle school students developed a mindset about whether or not intelligence grows?

Joon designed a survey with one item.

Procedure:

1. Distribute surveys to all the students at school.
2. Ask students to place completed surveys in a box in the library labeled "completed surveys."
3. Tally the survey results.

Check the box that matches what you think:

- ☐ People have a certain amount of intelligence and it doesn't change.
- ☐ People can get more intelligent over time if they work at it.

Data:

	Fixed Mindset (intelligence does not change)	Growth Mindset (intelligence can change with effort)
Sixth Grade	122	75
Seventh Grade	99	110
Eighth Grade	80	78

What do the data from Joon's survey tell you?

How would you answer Joon's survey? Why?

Do you think that Joon's survey provides enough information to determine a student's mindset? Why or why not?

Stanford University professor Dr. Carol Dweck reports from her research that people with a "growth mindset" live less stressful and more successful lives. Discuss this idea with your class.

Should school be a place for debate?



DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Debates do not belong in schools. They take too much time and students need to learn so much material for the state test.

B Debates should be used in schools so students can practice public speaking and forming opinions. However, most of the time spent in school should be on reading and listening to lectures. Teaching reading and listening skills will prepare students for college.

C Debates are necessary in schools. Since voting is a right of citizenship in the U.S., citizens need to be able to form and justify their opinions. The nation's future depends on the intelligence of its people.

D Debates should be used in schools. Reading from textbooks and listening to lectures is boring for students so they do not learn the material. Debates would get students interested so they would learn more.

E _____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

You make a good point, but have you considered...

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

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