Historical Association
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VOTE100

# The Great Debate:

## a teacher's guide















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# Creating the debate

## Introducing Public Speaking and 'The Great Debate'

This pack is a practical resource designed to support teachers who want to introduce public-speaking to their school. The Historical Association's 'The Great Debate' is a public-speaking competition for students in the UK and the Republic of Ireland aged between 16 and 18 that takes place every two years.

### Debate guidance

Encouraging students to take part in an inter-schools debate can be difficult and time-consuming but very rewarding. The Historical Association's 'The Great Debate' format is a good way for young people to:

- prepare a talk
- map out an argument
- research an idea or concept
- explore a variety of points of view
- deliver a piece to an audience
- prepare to take questions from people



The Historical Association's 'The Great Debate' format means that students will:

- have a set amount of time to present their argument(s)
- not have to argue across other students or challenge other people arguments
- take questions from the floor








## Preparation for teachers

Create a debate club or team; this can meet at lunchtimes or after school.

Ask them to identify ideas that they think are important and set some questions.

In preparation, choose five headlines from the previous week's media. This should act as a prompt on questions to debate or at least ask them why some people might agree with the headlines and why some people might disagree. For example:

- Scotland should be separate from the UK.
- Only MPs representing English constituencies should be able to vote on education changes.
- Exams don't prove how capable a person is.
- All British police should carry guns.
- History is not a useful subject for a career.

Each of the stages should have either two sessions or at least one session and a research session which can be done in the students' own time.







## Stage one

Divide the group into two and ask one side to research the arguments in favour of the question and the other group to research the arguments against – present to the group.

In discussion – is it easier to find arguments to support a statement than it is to disagree?

Tip: make sure you have an example for each statement for and against.

## Stage two

In small groups or individually pick another question and ask the students to find five arguments for and five against the questions – present to the group.

How easy is it to defend an argument you don't agree with?

Tip: If you don't agree with a point but you have to represent it then start by looking at factual evidence and how that evidence can be used persuasively.

## Stage three

Choose a subject from the list you have drawn up (see page 3 for examples) and find a personal example that would justify taking one side. The personal argument can be a student's own or one from history.

In pairs ask the students to prepare their arguments and then present them.

Discuss how they combined research with statements.

Tip: the personal example can be a point of view on someone else's experience. For example: My aunt works in a tourist office. Her A-level history is really useful when she is promoting the local tourist activities in her area.






## Stage four

'The Great Debate' format does not pit students against each other in a cross-discussion. Rather, students are asked to answer the set question choosing some arguments that they think would support one point of view and provide a personal response.

Look at the podcasts from previous contests to see how this is done. Go to:

www.history.org.uk//go/TheGreatDebate

The following questions might help your students to work together to prepare a talk in 'The Great Debate' format:

- The most important scientific discovery of the last 50 years is…
- The internet has changed my life from that of my grandparents irreversibly.
- Wars not social histories are the most important way to examine history.
- Women's history is only for girls.

Tip: as well as constructing your arguments, explore how someone might argue against your point (such as in weeks one and two). This will make it possible to add a line acknowledging that some people might disagree with you, despite which you have reached your conclusions.






## Stage five

Present your arguments to the group out loud and be prepared to have questions asked. Make sure that you stick to the time limit and have a friend or someone time it.
Tip: a good structure for your talk is to break it into parts: For example:

- First quarter – how you interpreted the subject and what it led you to think.
- Second quarter – your argument (presentation of evidence).
- Third quarter – a personal example of evidence to demonstrate how the subject relates to you.
- Final quarter – how people might disagree with your evidence but why you have reached your conclusion. Finish with your argument on the question once more.

Listen to the podcasts from the judges on what made the best talks – compare their comments with your own talk.
www.history.org.uk//go/TheGreatDebate






## Student practice – on your own or with a small group

If there is no organised club in your school but you still want to prepare for 'The Great Debate', use stages one to five above as a guide but focus much more on research and timings.

Prepare a talk in favour and against each of the questions and then think about which you found the easiest to do.

Choose one of the questions you feel you know nothing about and research the arguments for and against and find a personal example for each.

Listen to the HA podcasts from previous winners – note what you think is a good argument or not. Go to:

www.history.org.uk//go/TheGreatDebate

Break the previous winner's arguments down and use their format to create a talk – this will help you think about putting a talk together. Then look at the tip in stage five about breaking your talk into parts.






## Tips for public speaking

- Start with the whole talk written down if that helps you but then break it down into headline points so that you are not reading from a script. Each headline can be put on a card. If it makes you feel more confident you can still have the whole talk with you as a back-up.
- Look directly at the audience and pause at points in your talk.
- Look towards the back of the hall so that your head is held high. If you look down, people will not be able to hear you.
- Practise your talk so that you are sure about the timings.
- Check that you have an example of evidence for each of your arguments.
- Make sure you can give at least one reason why someone might disagree with you. This will prepare you to argue back rationally rather than simply giving an emotional response.
- Ask a friend or relative to listen to your talk and to ask you questions.
- Do not speak too quickly.





## Important for this year's 'The Great Debate':

Evidence should be shown in the entrants' argument that they have thought about possible criteria for judging historical significance. They should try to make these criteria explicit somewhere in their argument. The entrants' teachers are likely to be familiar with possible sets of criteria for judging historical significance that have been written about in the journal *Teaching History*. These could be useful in generating ideas for criteria.

For example, the entrant and/or their teacher could consult Phillips, R. (2002) 'Historical significance: the forgotten Key Element?', *Teaching History 106*; and/or Counsell, C. (2004) 'Looking through a Josephine-Butler-shaped window: focusing pupils' thinking on historical significance', *Teaching History, 114*. Counsell suggests 5 Rs: **Remembered, Revealing, Resonant, Remarkable and Resulting in change**. She invites teachers and pupils to use, challenge or extend these criteria. The entrant might use these or other criteria of their own for judging the historical significance of the phenomenon chosen.