



# CONNECTICUT MIDDLE SCHOOL DEBATE LEAGUE

## Debate Drills & Games

**Triple Speak** – Give a debater a word and they start making a speech about that word. After 20-30 seconds, give them a 2<sup>nd</sup> word. The speaker has to work that word into the speech in a way that makes sense. Give them a 3<sup>rd</sup> word after 20-30 more seconds.

**High Brow / Low Brow** – Make a list of pairs of things (maybe one is fancy-ish, the other is somewhat base). Debaters make arguments about why those things are so similar they are essentially the same thing.

**Lifeboat** – The world as we know it is ending (you choose the scenario) but a few individuals will survive. Debaters choose personas (present day, historical, imaginary, from fiction, whatever) and argue why they should be saved. The first 5 or so speakers are put into the “lifeboat.” The next speaker chooses someone in the lifeboat and makes arguments about why she or he should be in the “lifeboat” instead of that person. Person in boat who is being challenged then makes a speech to defend their position in the boat. Debaters vote on whether or not the challenged individual is replaced by the challenger or not.

**Super powers** – The CIA (or whatever organization you choose) has successfully developed super powers that they can give to individuals. They can only fund 5 or so. Debaters make arguments about why their super power should be included in the 5. Challengers choose 1 power and argue that their super power should be funded over that one. The Challenged power gets to give a rebuttal speech.

**Short Impact Speeches** – 1 minute speeches about why something is good or bad

Failing a class in school

Wildfires

Diversity

Autonomy

Democracy

Free Speech

Censorship

Lack of privacy

Mass incarceration

Income inequality

Increased use of opioids

Loss of electricity

Sexism

**Competing Impacts** -- Each debater argues why the impact on the left is more important than the impact on the right. Then why the one on the right is more important than the one on the left. Try to make arguments tangible, specific and significant. Think about:

- Number of people affected
- Significance of harm
- Probability – risk
- Ethics – morality

A bad haircut vs a bad outfit

Cheating on a test vs. lying to your parents

Earthquakes vs. flooding

Losing \$100 vs. losing \$1000

Losing an arm vs. losing a leg

Tornado vs. tidal wave

Warfare vs. poverty

Water pollution vs. air pollution

privacy vs. security

civil disobedience vs. respect for the law

scientific progress vs. animal welfare

autonomy vs. protection from harm

retribution vs. rehabilitation

Free speech vs. protection from hate speech

**Explain the Effects** – Give a 1-2 minute speech in which you present the event and its potential results. For example, if your topic were “earthquakes”, you might reason that an earthquake would destroy buildings, panic people, and cause injuries and death. Elaborate on the effects, helping the audience to visualize what would happen. Include an intro and conclusion.

winning the lottery

a major flood

joining the army

walking your dog

failing a class in Middle School

a large forest fire

getting 2 concussions

war

global warming

civil disobedience

raising the minimum wage

a woman is elected President of the United States

mass incarceration

disenfranchisement

**Explain the causes** – Brainstorm at least 3 things that could have caused each event. Be specific and try to talk about the most important causes in a 1-2 minute speech.

You decide to go to college.

Schools stop selling junk food.

Students bring cell phones to school.

You begin taking piano lessons.

You decide to study Chinese.

Colleges allow students to carry handguns on campus.

Congress passes a gun control bill.

President Obama pardons a nonviolent federal prisoner.

A guilty person is proven to be innocent.

You win first speaker in a debate tournament.

You go vegetarian.

The Democratic party gets rid of Superdelegates.

The price of gas falls.

Colleges adopt codes of conduct.

**Brainstorming contentions** – Give debaters a motion and 5 minutes to come up with as many PROP arguments as possible, working independently. Have everybody read their contentions aloud. Debaters get 1 point for each reasonable contention and 2 points for each reasonable unique contention (something nobody else thought of). Repeat on OPP.

**Debate Baseball** – Goal is to get debaters to hit a time limit. Give debaters a resolution.  
1<sup>st</sup> debater has 15-30 seconds to decide whether to argue for or against.  
Then debater delivers a speech for or against.

>30 sec = 1<sup>st</sup> base

>60 sec = 2<sup>nd</sup> base

>90 sec = 3<sup>rd</sup> base

>2 min = HR

Can divide into teams or not. You don't have to keep score or you can score it any way you want to! All members of team A go. Team A gets 1 pt for each HR. Then all members of team B go. Team with most points (HRs) wins. Some "easy" resolutions...

1. Ban animal testing
2. Be a vegetarian
3. Single sex schools are good for education
4. Raise driving age to 18
5. States should have the death penalty
6. The internet does more harm than good
7. States should ban cosmetic surgery
8. Ban violent video games
9. Americans should not have a constitutional right to bear arms
10. Ban beauty contests
11. Lower drinking age
12. Allow prisoners to vote
13. Use torture to get information from suspected terrorists
14. Ban alcohol
15. Allow teachers and students to be friends on Facebook
16. Abolish the United Nations

**Encouraging Multiple Refutations** – Give debaters an argument (you can use ones you hear at tournaments or pull from a source like procon.org) and have them come up with as many direct refutations to it as possible, using the following list of ways to directly refute.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>How to Refute</b>
<b>Direct factual error</b> – something they said is incorrect	Use evidence to show why they are wrong. Provide the correct facts.
<b>Indirect factual error</b> – while what they say may be technically true, it isn't the whole story and is thus misleading	Supply the missing information and show how this changes the meaning of the whole package.
<b>Misinterpretation</b> – even when facts are correct, the interpretation of those facts (the explanation) is disputable	Supply your alternate explanation, and argue why it is a more plausible and reasonable one.
<b>Moral flaw</b> – something can be true but morally unacceptable	Argue the moral counterexample – point out why you find their arguments unacceptable.
<b>Irrelevant</b> – something may be true but not have any impact on the debate at hand	Point out that it's irrelevant and show why it doesn't matter.
<b>Insignificant</b> – something may be true, but have minimal impact on what the debate should be about.	Concede that argument is true, but argue that it isn't important enough to sway the round.
<b>Contradiction</b> – some points sound fine on their own, but contradict one another	Point out what contradicts what.
<b>Unfounded assumptions</b> – sometimes people will forget to make part of their argument and just assume that everyone agrees that the left out part is true	Point out what has been assumed, then argue why the assumption is incorrect.
<b>Practical implications</b> – some arguments work better in theory than in practice	Question the practical implication – but be careful to attack only those implications that are unlikely to occur.
<b>Reliance on examples</b> – sometimes people forget to explain their reasoning and skip straight to illustration	Throw out a counter-example to show that not all the evidence is on their side.

**What's the Reason exercise** –Read the claim and have everyone think of reasons.

All students should learn to play a musical instrument, because...

Cell phones should be allowed in schools because...

It is more important to study math than English because...

Schools should have dress codes because...

The death penalty should be abolished because...

Prisoners with High School degrees should have access to free college courses because...

Sugary soft drinks should be taxed because...

Government should mandate paid maternity and paternity leave because...

Felons should have the right to vote because...

Physician assisted suicide should be legal because...

Photo-shopped ads should be labeled as such because...

Public single-sex schools should be allowed because...

**What's the claim exercise** – Think of a claim that the reasoning supports. There is no 1 correct answer.

Because it is important to read books...

Because video games are violent...

Because it is important to protect privacy...

Because eating breakfast is important for health and well-being...

Because 16 year olds' brains are not fully developed...

Because the cost of a college education is too high...

Because voter turnout is low...

Because the philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next...(that's an Abraham Lincoln quote)

Because biodiversity is important...

Because there are so many accidental gun deaths in the US every year...

Because we value fairness...

Because carbon dioxide contributes to climate change...

Because we value equality...

Because childhood obesity is such a large and increasing problem in the US...

**Logical Fallacies** – Kids love to think about logical fallacies. Logicalfallacies.info lists a lot of them. You could start meetings by having a debater explain one to his/her teammates. You could do a lesson on types of fallacies – relevance, ambiguity, presumption. Here are some faves of debaters...

- **the causation/correlation fallacy.** The debater says that because 2 things occur simultaneously, one must be caused by the other.
- **the naturalistic fallacy, also called the “is/ought” fallacy.** The debater assumes that because something happens in a certain way in today’s world, it ought to always happen in that way.
- **begging the question.** This is another way of saying the argument is circular meaning that the argument assumes premises that assume the conclusion of the argument.
- **the false dilemma.** This type of argument puts two options in opposition to each other and forces a choice between these two options but ignores other potential options.
- **straw man.** The debater deliberately misrepresents a position in order to make it appear weaker than it is, refutes the misrepresentation, then concludes that the real position has been refuted.
- **ad hominem attacks (personal attacks).** These arguments focus on the character of the person advancing an argument, not on the evidence they present. They try to discredit positions by discrediting those who hold them.

**Say it Simply** – have the students think of a favorite book, movie, or tv show. Ask them to describe the plot in 10 words, then in five words, and then in one word.

**Conspiracy Theories** – have one debater choose a ridiculous position to defend (i.e. “the sky is green” or “we are on the moon”). The other debaters must then come up with questions to ask to disprove this initial proposition. The debater responding to the questions must answer them without lying while still attempting to defend the original ridiculous claim. The game ends when the debater can no longer defend the initial statement.