

Baltimore's best young orators 'For arguments sake'

By H. Allen Hurst
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"It's legalized Murder!" exclaimed Iman Brickus, 17.

"It's not murder if there's no life!" replied Ivory Okwor, 17.

"What defines a human life?" Acacia Asbell, 16, asked emphatically, while Cynthia Jones, 17, pointed out, "In 28 days the child's heart is beating, though."

"Well, what if she was raped?" Chenaya Neale, 17, asked critically of all the assertions.

As the newspaper's receptionist peeked into the room with her mouth agape, an interview with high school debaters turned into a full-fledged debate about abortion. Although the last rounds of the debate season were held March 5, these students believe "there is always room for debate."

The Baltimore Urban Debate League (BUDL), which is now overseeing

debate programs in 27 of Baltimore's public high schools, is now working with school administrators to further implement one of its newest initiatives, "Debate Across the Curriculum."

The goal is to provide students in any classroom, at any public school, access to debate. This innovation in education hopes to improve the grades of high school students throughout Baltimore.

In some cases, debaters find that more than their grades have improved. Since beginning debate, Iman has blossomed from a novice debater into Carver Vocational High's team captain. Accepted to Towson University's business program, the senior has "gained a lot of confidence," she said. "I used to be shy, but now I'm very outspoken."

Cynthia, Iman's debate partner, said that among her favorite issues to

debate are abortion, teen pregnancy and poverty. In her pre-debate ear, Cynthia said she was only concerned about her life. "Now when I look at the news, I'm like man, we just talked about that on Saturday!" she said. "Newspapers are my best friends now."

Ivory, whose father comes from Nigeria and mother from Pittsburgh, said debate has helped her family bond with one another more than ever.

"Political conversation comes up all the time in my house," the Carver senior said. "And now, it's like we just don't ask each other 'how did your day go' - (now) it's like, 'did you hear what Bush said?'"

Debate has also helped to reinvent Ivory, who "used to be the class clown, but now I'm the smart girl that you don't want to start an argument with," she said. "I beat people up with my words. I used to