



7.5 Real World Debates

This activity introduces and develops argumentation skills. In this activity, students analyze televised debates. The activity allows students to learn argumentation concepts by using them to evaluate political and social commentary and debate.

Time Allotment

20-40 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to critical listening.
- develop understanding of argument structure and logic.
- advance their understanding of current events and controversies.

Materials and Preparation

You will need a videotaped segment of a news magazine or debate program (like Crossfire, 60 Minutes, or the McLaughlin Group), or a videotape of some kind of social debate (a discussion of policy experts or political candidates, or a disagreement on a local talk show.) You will also need a TV and VCR.

Method

Before students watch the taped segment, have an introductory discussion with students about the components of an effective, logical, and persuasive argument. Ask them about what standards they use to evaluate a debate or disagreement. Introduce one or more debate concepts and criteria. Such concepts may include:

- Burden of proof
- Claims and warrants (including use of evidence)
- Responding directly to opponent's points (clash)
- Challenging of popular assumptions
- Presentation of alternative causality/alternative solution to some problem

Have student take notes during the video regarding how well different presenters live up to the criteria established in this introductory discussion. After watching the video, ask students to discuss their views, as a class or as groups. Encourage them to use specific examples to support their points.