ESU TEACHING RESOURCE

ALLEY DEBATE

OVERVIEW

Alley debates are a flexible, informal debating format that you can adjust to a group of any size. They work best when students have one or two specific goals to work towards in that alley debate.

TASK

Before beginning the alley debate, recap what students have learnt about making arguments. This may be generating reasons using "Why? Because…", or may include using a more developed acronym like REAL or PEEL.

Now recap or introduce students to rebuttal. Rebuttal will take place at the start of every speech in the debates that they will take part in, and is a response to the previous speaker. Students may wish to use the following rebuttal template:

The previous speaker said…
I disagree because…
Instead I think…

E.g.
The previous speaker said fish make great pets because they are easy to look after.
I disagree because being easy to look after is not the most important thing about a pet.
Instead I think that the best pets are loyal and friendly – after all, a pot plant is easy to look after and that is not a good pet, whereas a dog is difficult to look after, but because it is loyal and friendly it is a great pet.

Students should practise giving rebuttal – this may be in response to arguments you generate, or they can work in pairs.

OBJECTIVES

- To become familiar with a debate as an activity with two sides
- To understand that in a formal debate, each speech should begin with rebuttal.
- To listen to others and respond accordingly (e.g. by building on their ideas, or responding to them)

RESOURCES

A list of topics for debates, e.g.
We should ban fast food shops
We should not have to wear school uniform
PE should not be compulsory

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Recap this activity by reminding students that every debate speech must begin with rebuttal (unless, of course, you are the first speaker in a debate).

2. Alley debate

We are now ready to have a debate. Each debate will have up to 15 students on each side of the motion – if you have more than 30 students, please form more than one debate.

Give the students a topic to debate. One side is for the topic, the other is against.

Give the students 5 minutes to work in pairs to think of as many arguments as they can for their side of the debate. Students should be aware, as they prepare, that they will each have up to one minute to rebut the speaker before them, and give an argument of their own. Students cannot repeat arguments that have already been made: they must either prove wholly new claims, or provide different reasons or examples for claims that have been made before.

After the 5 minute preparation time, ask the students to form “alleys”. Each alley debate consists of up to 30 students, in two lines of equal number, facing each other.

The first speaker from the “for” side begins. Then a speaker from the “against” side. The debate continues, alternating between for and against, until everyone has spoken.

Note: for some students, this task will be very challenging. It can be made more accessible by permitting a short pause after each speech in which the next speaker can plan their response, even in consultation with those standing next to them. Other students can use this time to assess whether they need to think of new arguments, and to do so if required.

Development

To challenge students, ask them to give longer speeches in the alley debate. A 2-3 minute speech should contain 2 arguments (rather than 1, as above). For this to work, the alley itself must be shorter: a maximum of 8 students per team rather than 15.

When students are giving longer speeches, challenge the students by asking them to rebut not just 1 argument from the previous speaker, but both of them.