ESU TEACHING RESOURCE

BALLOON DEBATE

OVERVIEW

This activity introduces students to concepts they will use in more formal debates, such as making initial speeches, giving responses to questions, and addressing other people's arguments.

There is lots of scope to adjust the game for different groups or goals, and you can see these variants in the tips.

OBJECTIVES

- To gain experience speaking in an informal debate setting.
- To think creatively to generate relevant arguments.
- To develop persuasive responses to simple questions.

TASK

Select five or six people to take part in the debate.

They should think of a character (or you can assign them, if you prefer). You should set a theme for the character, e.g. "a historical figure", "a modern celebrity", "someone you admire", etc.

Now explain the scenario: these five people are in a hot air balloon. It is sinking because it is too heavy. The only way for us to survive is for one person to be thrown out of the balloon.

In the first round each person now has to give a short speech (no more than 2 minutes, although it could be as short as 30 seconds, depending on the group) explaining why they should not be thrown out of the balloon.

The second round deals with questions and answers. Ask each student one of the questions from a list like this:

Why is your character special?
What is the best thing about your character?
Can you tell us about your character's job?
Can you tell us a story that shows why your character is special?
Can you give more detail about a point in your speech?

ESU TEACHING RESOURCE

They should get a reasonable time to answer but feel free to stop them if they take too long. Ask a second question of each if there is time.

Now ask the class to vote on who persuaded them most. Remind them that they shouldn't vote on which character they like most, but rather on how well each person did in persuading them in favour of that character.

You can then hold more balloon debates as time allows. Whether you choose a new topic or see what fresh students do with the old one is up to you.

Tips

Voting off – For a more competitive atmosphere to you can hold a vote between each round for which character gets "thrown out of the balloon" and joins the audience. You can continue with rounds until only one winner is left.

This might lead to 4 or 5 rounds of competition. You can continue to alternate speech rounds and question rounds if you wish, making the speakers strive to find the one new idea that might "save them". Alternately you can introduce different rounds to add variety.

1. Ask the speakers to respond to the speech of the person next to them. (This is like "rebuttal" in a full debate.) Speakers should explain why someone else's reasons were not good arguments for why they should stay in the balloon. (E.g. *"Speaker X said '…' but I disagree because…")*

2. Ask the audience to ask questions. Questions should be aimed at all speakers. After 4 or 5 questions have been answered by the speakers, take another vote.

3. Ask volunteers from the audience to make short speeches defending someone in the balloon. When everyone has been defended at least once (some prompting may be necessary here – for example you could divide the remaining students into "fan groups", assigned to each speaker), people in the balloon should deliver short speeches summarising the main points raised.