

# Y6

LESSON 6  
YOUTH  
V.1



political

## MODELS OF ENGAGING IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: DEBATE YOUTH LESSON 6: POLITICAL PEACE 1

### TIME REQUIRED

1 1/2 hours

### TEACHER PREPARATION

To prepare for this lesson...

- Read the “[5 Spheres of Peace](#)” NPA Framework focusing on the political peace sphere
- Read the [Teacher’s Guide](#) for preparation and reflection questions

### MATERIALS

- Debate format handout
- Printed list of possible debate topics or a computer to access the Internet

### LEARNING GOALS

- Students will reflect upon how values and life experiences inform political opinions
- Students will engage in one model of political discourse and reflect upon the benefits and deficits of using this model for peacebuilding in political conflict
- Students will think about what informs their political opinions

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will discuss the connection between political rights and the responsibility of political engagement
- Students will engage in a political debate over an issue of their choosing
- Students will reflect on the process of debate – how decisions are made and what if any skills used in debate can build peace in political conflict

### INTRODUCTION

Political experiences during adolescents can help prepare students to take part in the political sphere as adults. In preparation for joining the larger societal political discourse, youth need ample experiences to explore their personal values and political opinions, as well as analyze the different methods used to engage in political discourse. Understanding the different social purposes, outcomes, benefits and deficits of models of political dialogue can nurture an awareness of how and why these models of discourse are used. Given the opportunity, youth can be a powerful voice of change and creative problem-solving within schools and communities.

The two activities for youth included within the Political Sphere will give students the opportunity to explore: 1) How do individuals form political opinions? Why do they hold on so tightly to their political ideals? 2) What are different methods of entering political discourse? Do all of these methods serve the same purposes? What skills within these methods can be used to help build peace within families, communities, and nations?

The first activity takes the form of a political debate. Political debates are a form of discussion

most youth are familiar with. From high school debate teams, community forums, and presidential elections, debates are often used to present differing political perspectives. The polarizing nature of a debate makes it possible for students to analyze two opposing sides in a conflict, and see their own opinions and values regarding the issue arise. This polarization, although perhaps easier to analyze, can potentially exclude a diversity of opinions, solutions, and voices as the discussion is presented purely for or against a political statement. It is important for students to have experience with this commonly used format, while critically thinking about what this process contributes and what is missing. In preparing for the debate students will get the opportunity to reflect on why they hold specific political opinions. They will begin to recognize the values and life experiences that inform their political opinions and the opinions of others as they listen to the persuasive arguments made by the other team. The guiding questions below will help students reflect through this process on the benefits and deficits of engaging in political discourse using the debate model.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be politically active or involved?
- Are there any skills or knowledge you need to be politically active?
- What are the benefits of being politically active? What happens if people choose not to be politically active?
- What skills, knowledge, or methods facilitate peacebuilding while discussing political issues?

## OPENING DISCUSSION

Begin by posing the “Guiding Questions” to students. Give students time to think and respond to each. You may want to have the questions posted on the board and give students five minutes or more to write down their thoughts before engaging in a class discussion. If students do not bring up the issue of rights and responsibilities, ask students what happens to political rights if individuals are not engaged in politics? Is there a responsibility to stay aware of what is happening politically? Why or why not? Ask students what skills or knowledge is needed to be politically active? How do people develop political opinions? Where do political opinions come from?

Share with students that peoples’ political opinions are driven by their values on what they believe is the right way for individuals to act towards others and how citizens should be treated by their government. Because each person has a different set of values and principles, formed by their life experiences, there are often conflicting opinions when it comes to political issues. There are many different ways of engaging in political discussions so these differences in opinion can be explored. Let students know over the next two lessons they are going to try two of many different models of engaging in political discussion. The first is the debate model. Ask students if they have ever seen a debate. If yes, ask students why they think a debate was used. What is the purpose of having a debate? What are the benefits? Who is given the opportunity to debate? How does a debate present different opinions and ideas? The second model of political discussion students will try is a dialogue model. Ask students if they have heard of the word “dialogue.” Ask them what the word “dialogue” makes them think of. When would a dialogue be used and for what purposes? Do you think a debate and a dialogue are used for the same purpose? Do you think they have similar or different outcomes? Why?

## ACTIVITY 1: POLITICAL DEBATE

1. To begin the debate process, first have students pick a political topic they feel passionate about. In the United States there are many political issues students may be knowledgeable about that can be used in a debate: abortion, the death penalty, gay marriage, nationalized health care, immigration policies, and energy sources. If students are not familiar enough with these larger political issues, think about what issues are specifically relevant to your students. Some of these issues may or may not include: Legal driving OR drinking ages, school uniforms, vending machines with junk food/soda on school property, illegal downloading, parental blocks on television or computers. (More debate topics can be found by clicking on the link “Debate Topics” in the resources section.)

### TEACHER TIP

Laying some ground rules for the debate such as no name-calling or belittling can be useful. Not only will this help students stick to the facts of their discussion it will provide a safe atmosphere for students to voice differences in opinion.

2. Have students rewrite their topic into an affirmative statement. For example, if the debate topic is the legal drinking age, it could be stated: “If resolved by the following debate, the legal drinking age should be changed to 18” or “If resolved by the following debate, the legal drinking age should remain at 21”. Your debate teams are then referred to as the affirmative, those in favor of the statement, and the negative those against the statement.

3. Ask students to break into two teams, those in favor of the issue and those against. The teams do not need to have an equal number of students. However, if one team is much smaller than the other you may want to ask if any volunteers would be interested in switching sides or as the teacher you can join the team with less students and support them in their research.

4. Explain the format of a debate to students, by passing out the debate format handout. In the interest of time and to include more members in each group presentation, the debate format has been slightly altered from [official debate formats](#) but the process is still true to form.

5. Give students 30 minutes to collaborate with their group members to prepare evidence, construct their arguments, and decide on their presenters for a simple debate. If you have more time available, groups can conduct research and work on creating a persuasive argument to present to the class. In order to help guide the group preparation, let students know that the following items are helpful in preparing a convincing argument:

- Statistical evidence
- Personal accounts or stories
- The values that inform their perspective
- The possible social, economic, ecological consequences of affirming or denying the statement

6. Once students have completed their preparation, conduct the debate.

7. After the debate is over, give students a few minutes to independently reflect on the following questions. After reflection, invite students to share their thoughts with the class.

- Why did you join the affirmative/negative team? What life experiences or values do you have that influence your political opinion on this issue?
- Do you think everyone in your group had the same reasons for joining your team?
- What were some persuasive arguments or points made by the other team?
- What values and/or experiences do you think informed the other team members' political opinions?

## CLOSING

In closing, ask the class the following questions:

- Which team, if either, do you think won the debate? Why?
- Do you think this model is helpful in finding solutions to political issues? Why or why not?
- Do you think this model looks at the chosen issue from enough angles? Where there many different ideas, opinions, or solutions presented?
- Why do you think this model is commonly used to discuss political issues?
- Do you think the debate process facilitates peacebuilding? Why or why not?

### TEACHER TIP

Teachers are highly encouraged to conduct another debate as described in the follow-up activities. By conducting a second debate where students prepare for both sides of the argument, students are challenged to take the perspective of others which can illuminate the thinking and values behind others opinions, as well as, challenge their personal assumptions and ideas.

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1) Have students pick another political issue they are interested in debating. Tell students to prepare for both sides of the debate. On the day of the debate you will tell students which side they will be representing. Having students prepare the debate from both sides will challenge them to think deeply about the motivations, values, and statistics that may support another person's political stance. This is an excellent activity in perspective-taking.

2) Give students two or more political cartoons, illustrated from different perspectives on the same political issue. The [political cartoon analysis sheet created by the National Archives](#), is a resource which can be used to challenge students to think critically about the symbols and messages seen in these cartoons. When students have done the analysis ask them if this form of political discourse is effective. Ask students how the media plays a role in influencing political opinions and discourse.

3) There are many different ways to empower students to be politically engaged in the school environment. Opportunities for political engagement can include: letter writing to local and state representatives, student created petitions, student government, weekly town hall meetings where students can share their ideas for changes needed at school, hold mock elections – just because students are too young to vote in the local or national elections they can still voice their opinions through mock elections held at school.

## REGISTRATION, FEEDBACK & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Use of this curriculum is free – no registration is required. However, we encourage you to take 3-5 minutes to complete our [registration/feedback form](#) so we may know how and where the curriculum is being used, what is most effective, and how we can continue to improve it.

\*This curriculum was developed by [Tony Jenkins](#) and [Tiffany Jenkins](#). Reproduction and distribution is permissible and encouraged, however credit should be given to the authors and the [National Peace Academy](#).

## RESOURCES

- [Possible debate topic lists from the Middle School Public Debate Program](#)
- [Debate format handout modeled after the format found online at California State University Northridge](#)
- [Reading on class debates from the International Debate Education Association](#)
- [Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet provided by the National Archives and Records Administration](#)
- [Making Informed Decisions & Critical Thinking. Lesson plan intended to help students develop opinions, think critically, and conduct research provided by PBS](#)

## DEBATE FORMAT HANDOUT

### Constructive Speeches – 16 minutes

*Two members present a four-minute speech from each team. The evidence the team has collected to support or deny the claim should be presented here as a persuasive argument.*

- Affirmative Team Member 1 presents – 4 minutes
- Negative Team Member 1 presents – 4 minutes
- Affirmative Team Member 2 presents – 4 minutes
- Negative Team Member 2 presents – 4 minutes

Notes:

### Cross Examination –10 minutes

*Each team will be given 4 minutes to prepare questions for the opposing side. Questions should be oriented towards finding holes in the opposing team's arguments. One person from your team will conduct the cross-examination.*

- prepare questions for the opposing team - 4 minutes
- cross examination – 1 minute of asking questions; 2 minutes to respond for each team

Notes:

### Rebuttals – 8 minutes

*The Rebuttal is two short speeches, given by two team members . The rebuttal is a response to the other team's overall argument and includes closing remarks. For example: "Based upon the facts that the affirmative/negative has presented such as . . . I believe that . . ." Each team can decide who will conduct their rebuttal.*

- Affirmative Team Member 1 presents – 2 minutes
- Negative Team Member 1 presents – 2 minutes
- Affirmative Team Member 2 presents – 2 minutes
- Negative Team Member 2 presents – 2 minutes

Notes: