

## Hosting a Presidential Debate



### Objective

To analyze campaign issues and to practice formal debate procedures and elements of logic. Extension activities address the history of presidential election debates and the importance of rhetoric and word choice in debates.

### Day One: Logical Fallacies Study and “How To Master Debate” Film

[Handout #1](#): Techniques of Persuasion and Logical Fallacies. Students may work singly or in pairs to complete their own examples of the logical fallacies, and to explain the four examples of fallacies used by Kennedy, Reagan, Clinton, Bush, and Romney.

Play the *We The Voters* film “How to Master Debate,” which shows two Senators using most of the fallacies that students have just learned, during a debate on global warming. Instruct students to identify the logical fallacies as they watch, and then play the film a second time, pausing to allow students to identify each fallacy.

[How to Master Debate](#) from [We the Voters](#) on [Vimeo](#).

**Homework**, Day One: Instruct students to watch the presidential debate that evening, and to record their own analysis on [Handout #2](#): Debate Watch Notes. As they watch, students should note any examples of fallacies in the candidates' responses. Remind students that the emerging issues may surprise them. For example, in the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate, no one could have predicted that a whole presidential debate would center on Quemoy and Matsu, two small islands near Taiwan.

## **Day Two: Preparing the Classroom Debate**

[Handout #3](#): Debate Ballot. In discussion with the whole class, and referring to the debate issues of the night before, select a debate resolution. Remember that the resolution must always be written in the positive format, i.e. "The United States should start a land war with ISIS", not "A land war with ISIS would be a mistake."

The eight debating students will then work outside the classroom and for homework, if necessary on the phone at night, to prepare their arguments, using [Handout #4](#): Debate Arguments Template.

While debate teams are working, review [Handout #5](#): History of the Presidential Debates with the rest of the class. Have students read the presidential debate summaries dating back to the 1960 election and discuss the following questions as a class:

1. What debate would you like to have been present for? Why?
2. How could some of the highlights from these debates have swayed the electorate? Would you have been swayed in the same way?
3. How might televising the debates have influenced who had the stronger performance?

4. Does the electorate deserve to see how the candidates will do under the stress of a nationally televised debate? Explain.

Go to YouTube after you have read through the summaries to watch the debates, for example:

Kennedy Nixon First Debate 1960:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QazmVHA00os>

Reagan debates interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T43EzCUtSwQ>

Bush Clinton Debate, 1992: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ffbFvKIWqE>

Obama Romney final debate, 2012:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5z0WrEb6p6I>

### **Day Three: Classroom Debate**

Hold the debate in class. While you give the debaters five final minutes for review before starting the debate, hand out fresh copies of [Handout #3](#): Debate Ballot, which are used as the students' ballots. Emphasize the rules at the bottom about objectivity, as well as the observers' extra credit opportunity.

Time each portion of the debate carefully, using a timer or stopwatch. The debate itself takes 30 minutes. Allow only five minutes for students to mark their ballots and to fill out the extra credit portion, if they wish to do so.

Collect the ballots. Tally the ballots on the board, reading an occasional "This team won the debate because..." be sure you've finished the tally before the bell rings!

## Extension Activities

- [Handout #6](#): A Note on Fact Checking reviews three principal fact checking sites, as well as two fact-checks of remarks made at the 2016 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, and includes discussion questions.
- [Handout #7](#): Words Count deals with the use of rhetoric, and key quotes from past presidential and vice-presidential debates.

Teacher Resource:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/host-a-presidential-debate-lesson-plan/>

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