

Teacher Tips & Tricks for Making Pop-up Debate a Successful Routine

Before the debate:

- Clearly explain and model the move(s) you'll be expecting students to make.
 - If you're wondering what "moves" to start with, using the Writing standard #1 (the argumentative writing standard) from the Common Core. As an example of how to do that, here are the skills listed in the Grades 6-8 Writing Standard #1:
 - Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content, with each highlighted color being an example of a different "move" you could expect kids to make (and grade them on) in a given debate.
 - Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
 - Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
 - Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
 - Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
 - Make sure you **don't** simply plop this standards-ish language on the board -- create [They Say, I Say-style sentence templates](#) (Graff & Birkenstein, 3rd e., 2014) to explicitly show kids how these moves look and sound.
 - I use these skills as a starting point, and then I listen to how the kids are doing throughout the year as a group and add or delete skills as needed. Keep in mind that I'm not a trained debate coach and haven't done much reading on competitive debate; I am, however, someone who can listen and identify areas for improvement -- and so are you :)
 - Time permitting, have students set 1-2 personal goals for the debate. This is a way to differentiate -- students who are advanced in speaking/listening skills ought to set goals that will stretch them, whereas students who struggle in speaking/listening will

do likewise.

- Also, once your kids know [PVLEGS](#), have them set a PVLEGS goal prior to the debate. I like to have them choose one and then explain why they chose it in 2-3 sentences.
 - Follow up on this if you do it -- after the debate, you can have them write 2-3 additional sentences reflecting on how they did, or you can have them pass their paper to the person on their left and have *that* person provide feedback on how they did.
 - If you're not familiar with PVLEGS, Palmer's [Well-Spoken](#) is a must-read. I tell people it's *the* greatest discovery I made during the 2013-2014 school year; I haven't yet mined half its treasures (I've been focusing on PVLEGS with my kids, but there's an entire section on building a speech that needs our attention); and it's one of those teacher books that is blessedly, beautifully **brief**. (I hold in highest respect authors and teachers who make things *simpler* for me as a teacher.)

During the debate:

- Watch for the teachable moments. If you are having trouble multi-tasking with paying attention / keeping track of students who have spoken successfully / videotaping, assign jobs to students as needed.
 - Possible jobs:
 - Have kids assess one another on PVLEGS using a simple rubric with scales from 1-5 (this idea is in Palmer's recent [Teaching the Core Skills of Speaking and Listening](#))
 - Have some or all students be "fact-checkers." Teach them how to determine when fact-checking is called for and how to do it efficiently.
 - Have a student be an "um" counter
 - Just to be clear, I'm not huge on giving a million jobs during a debate; it's just not something I've done. However, that's not to say that it's not a good idea.
- Interrupt the debate periodically to point out effective or "so close to awesome it hurts" speeches -- be specific with students about what worked and what didn't.
- When a student makes one of the moves in an exemplary fashion, pause the debate to explain what the student did and why it was effective.
- Model the debate moves by popping up and participating yourself!
 - I do this sparingly in my own classroom because I don't want them to become dependent upon me to make debates interesting. But I **do** do it because it's hard (they expect a lot from the teacher), it's modeling, and, heck, it's just fun to get in there and wrassle around with 'em a bit :)

After the debate:

- Have students write:
 - A reflection on whether they met their personal goals.
 - One final argument they'd make if they had to stand up again.

Remember:

- Pop-up debate is most powerful when it becomes a routine. Once students become acclimated to the format and expectations, I am able to pull pop-up debate into a lesson on the fly.
 - E.g., when a student brings up a debatable idea during discussion and I don't want the lesson to get totally derailed by it, I can say, "Okay, you have five minutes for pop-up debate -- go" and kids will engage with the idea and each other for that segment of time, and I can sit back and watch them conduct efficient, quality discussion.
- Think of pop-up debate as a set of LEGOs -- it's cool to follow the instructions perfectly at first and build the thing on the front of the box, but then, for years and years afterward, it's fun to just use the pieces in the box, combine them with pieces from other boxes, and create all kinds of things. Once you get the hang of pop-up debate, play around with it and modify it to fit your kids. Constantly strive to improve it.

Tricks:

- Use PVLEGS ([Palmer, 2011](#)) and SLANT ([Lemov, 2010](#)) when teaching kids how to speak and listen well ([see annotated slideshow](#)). These acronyms provide an efficient framework on which students can build an understanding of the basic qualities of effective speaking (in terms of speech delivery) and listening.
 - Not a fan of SLANT? It's all good -- lead your students in brainstorming "What Good Listeners Do" and record their thoughts on an anchor chart / poster ([Palmer, 2014, p. 63](#)).
- Develop shorthand language with your students for referring to parts of the pop-up debate routine
 - E.g., My students will ask, "Are we allowed to **repeat** right now?", meaning, "I've already spoken once -- may I speak again?"
- On getting shy kids to speak, especially at the start of the year:
 - Before a debate, ask the class, in a disarming manner, "All right, how many of you are nervous right now?" The goal is to get most of their class raising their hand. Say: "Now, for those of you in here who are nervous, look around you: you are normal! Many people are nervous right now."
 - Encourage the use of notes.
- When there is a lull in the debate, try:
 - Rephrasing the question.
 - Restating the question exactly, prompting students to focus on each word. (The prompt or debatable statement's language is the playing field of any given debate -- students have a habit of wandering off the field (a deadly sin in competitive debate called "topicality"), and I try teaching them to call each other out on that.
 - Randomly calling on students who haven't spoken (this is made non-threatening when we've given them a chance to write down what they

might say -- some of my shyest students need to be called on at the start of the year, and so one of my earliest goals for them is that they'll simply stand up without being called upon.)

- On making sure every kid talks:
 - I use a simple roster on a clipboard, giving each speaker a check if he/she did the required move(s) or not. This allows me, during a lull or when I want to get new ideas flowing, to quickly identify students who have not spoken yet and call on them.
- On making sure kids come to debate prepared:
 - If you're worried some kids are not doing whatever "debate prep" you required (e.g., reading an article the day/night before; conducting online research; etc), have them write a paragraph *before* the debate and turn it in to you -- this allows you to see what they walked into the classroom ready to do.
- On giving your kids quality feedback:
 - The best feedback I've ever given kids on their speaking is showing them their speaking. Use your smartphone or ask your administrator if there is district video recording equipment or if it's possible to acquire some; film students doing debate (I'd recommend waiting until most students are comfortable with pop-up debate, at least 1-2 months into the school year) and post it to Youtube **as a link-only video** (this allows you to share the link with your students while also protecting their privacy from random Internet / Youtube searches). Have students watch the video and write a one-paragraph reflection on what they did well / what they need to work on.
 - Be more specific as needed (e.g., have them observe their SLANTing, their PVLEGS, or their They Say / I Say moves -- see [the annotated slideshow](#) for more info on these things).
 - Keep in mind that, if you teach in a highly litigious area, you'll want to get explicit, clear permission slips signed before even "link-only" filming.
- Ensure a safe environment -- laughing and side-talk should be firmly and openly dealt with unless it is in response to humor.

**Have ideas or tips to add
to this list? Maybe a
question for Dave?**

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