

# Character and Life Skills

**Video Title:** Civility, Social Awareness

**Lesson Title:** Civility is Debatable

**Grade Level:** High School



## Project and Purpose

Students prepare for and participate in a civil debate about civil behaviors.

## Essential Question

What role does civility play in our society?

**Note:** This lesson can take up to five days for preparation and presentation of debates. It expands upon the Tag-Team Debate lesson provided in the Lesson Blueprint section of the CWK website.

## Materials

- Index cards (enough for one per student), half with "Pro" and half with "Con" written on them
- Debate Topic Cards (cut and paste onto index cards or paper)
- Access to research materials on the topic
- Writing tools and/or computer writing program
- Timer

## Procedure

1. Ask students how they feel about the idea of school uniforms and/or dress codes. In their opinion, what purpose do they serve? What purpose are they supposed to serve?
2. Explain that research has been conducted over the years about this topic, and it will serve as one of the topics to be used for a class tag-team debate.
3. Tell students that this will be a randomly assigned debate so students can practice developing an argument; they will draw a card from your deck of index cards, and this will tell them which side of the argument they will support in the debate. (**Note:** You always have the option of having students choose for themselves.)
4. After they have "chosen sides," divide the class into three teams of 12, six with "pro" and six with "con". Each team will draw a Debate Topic Card.
5. Explain the rules of the debate:
  - Teams have five (5) minutes to argue for their side of the statement in front of the whole class. They must speak for the full time period. During those five minutes, each student may only talk for one minute. Before their minute runs up, they must "tag" a new group member to continue the argument. The team continues to "tag" other group members until the five minutes runs up. Group members cannot speak again until everyone else on their team has spoken.

- While the first team is presenting their argument, the opposing side should practice civility by listening and taking notes that can be used to develop their rebuttal.
  - After the first team has presented their argument for five minutes, the opposing team has five minutes to present their side. The same rules apply: they must speak for the full time period. Each group member may only speak for one minute before they have to “tag” a new group member to continue the argument. Group members cannot speak again until everyone else on their team has spoken.
  - During this time, the first team should take notes that can be used to develop their rebuttal.
  - Once the second team’s five minutes are up, both teams will have two minutes to develop a rebuttal argument. Each team’s rebuttal argument should be in response to their opposing team’s argument. Each team will have two minutes to present their rebuttal.
6. Give each team sufficient time to research, prepare, write up, and rehearse their arguments; this should take at least two class periods. They should be able to cite research, articles, and experts in the field. (**Note:** This might require an introductory lesson on how to identify reputable resources.)
  7. During the preparation time, the teacher should visit each group to make sure they understand the roles and responsibilities of the debate.
  8. When the class debate is to begin, establish an audience position for the groups to observe the debating teams and review the expected civil behaviors for the observers: students should actively and respectfully listen to their classmates.
  9. Assign a timer for each debate, preferably a person not involved in the debate itself.
  10. As the teacher, you should mediate the debate as they present their arguments.
  11. Repeat instructions before each team presents so all group members are clear on the expectations.

## Conclusion

Discuss what students learned about civility from each debate. How did civility play a role in the debates themselves? What ideas have they formed about civility in our communities? What role does civility play in our society?

## Notes

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## Debate Topic Cards

Cut and paste onto index cards or paper:

Some schools and businesses require uniforms. Many schools and businesses have dress codes. Schools that have Jr. ROTC programs report significantly less behavior issues resulting in disciplinary measures on the days that ROTC students are required to wear their military uniforms. Do you believe that one's manner of dress impacts civility?

John F. Kennedy said, "So let us begin anew — remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness..." Do you believe civility might be interpreted as a sign of weakness?

A 2017 article in Psychology Today states, "The media reports incidents of unsportsmanlike and sometimes illegal behavior by sport parents. And most of us have witnessed (or at least heard stories about) the very real problems created by (adults) who simply go too far. The most extreme episode occurred in 2000, when a Massachusetts hockey referee was beaten to death by a father who was upset about rough play. The assailant was convicted of involuntary manslaughter." Do you believe coaches, program directors, sports officials, and athletes have a right to demand that spectators conform to civil standards of behavior?