

# The debate that multiplies

Primary: (ages 7 – 11)

Literacy and language

Debate techniques allow children to go deeper in the analysis of problems and search for solutions. These techniques encourage children to investigate, to formulate their ideas and argue. The first objective is to generate original ideas in large numbers during a brainstorming phase, then to engage in a series of discussions of the ideas in groups of different sizes, and finally to draw a consensus.

*Note: This activity could also be adapted for use in secondary contexts*

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**Time allocation**      About 5 lesson periods

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**Subject content**      Develop discussion and debating skills  
Read, research, and produce texts in a native or foreign language  
Develop ability to speak persuasively

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**Creativity and critical thinking**      This unit has a **creativity** and **critical thinking** focus:

- Challenge assumptions and analyse gaps in knowledge
- Generate, stretch, and play with unusual and radical ideas
- Justify beliefs based on logical criteria and reasoning
- Reflect on and review alternative theories and find perspectives on the problem

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**Other skills**      Communication, Persistence/Perseverance, respect/tolerance of difference

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**Key words**      social studies; democracy; citizenship; debate; expression; identity; values; opinions; multidisciplinary; interdisciplinary; social studies

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## Products and processes to assess

Students take part in a brainstorming session which leads to a series of discussions and debates. At the highest levels of achievement, students take the initiative to generate and explore a variety of unusual and imaginative ideas and make connections between them. They take a specific personal position, review it and compare perspectives, and justify it with good evidence. They show a clear understanding of the strengths and limitations of their chosen and alternative position and are open to the ideas and feedback of others.

## Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce as many modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
Note		Inspired by design thinking, these activities are based on a 5-stage methodology: <b>at the first stage</b> , children are invited to observe the world around them by identifying a problem that affects them or a situation they would like to improve. They are asked to deepen their knowledge of the selected issues in order to imagine appropriate solutions. <b>At the second stage</b> , collective creativity is activated when the group is required to come up with ideas for concrete actions, one of which is chosen to be worked on in the following weeks. <b>The third stage</b> is the time to confront reality and implement the adopted ideas with pragmatism. <b>At the fourth stage</b> , the children reflect on their lived experiences, they summarise, come up with conclusions and prepare an event with parents, residents and the rest of the school to present their experience and conclusions. <b>The fifth stage</b> involves students starting to bring about change in society by presenting the solutions they discussed to the chosen problem. This last stage is the one that will multiply the debate and echo their voice into society.		
2	Lesson period 1	<p>The teacher can build with their students the working environment and agreements that will be necessary to implement the project. Students will have a better understanding and awareness about the rules if they are defined and discussed together.</p> <p>The students individually reflect on what they need in order to work well. They write each element on a post-it, then collect them all and group them in “packages of need” on a big paper sheet. The teacher can help them to think of non-physical elements (i.e. other than pen, notebook) by giving them other examples (e.g. silence, guidance, feedback). The students are divided into sub-groups by each need and each group asked to reflect on the rules to follow in order to address the specific need of their group. They can be given an example, “so that you can discuss in a group, one person has to speak at a time”.</p>	<p>Citizenship: engaging in debate and exercising and discussing free speech and direct democracy</p> <p>Learning how to work together and build a learning community</p>	<p>Feel, empathise, observe, and describe relevant experience and information</p> <p>Generate and play with unusual ideas for how to ensure a good working environment</p> <p>Considering several perspectives on a problem</p> <p>Explaining strengths and limitations of rules and ideas</p>

Each group shares the rules it has set with the rest of the class. These can be recorded somewhere in the classroom so everyone can read them and begin a discussion: "What do you think? Do you all agree with this rule?" The debate can focus on the role and value of each rule. If some do not agree, the teacher can find out why and if necessary reformulate the rule to fit all opinions.

Some principles students should have in mind during group discussions:

- do not judge: all ideas are good (do not to censor or laugh, the selection will be made later), be open and flexible in changing your own ideas; admit mistakes.
- produce as many ideas as possible: the best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas
- daring crazy ideas: geniuses' ideas are often not far from absurd ideas
- bounce off the ideas of others: listen to each other, make chains of ideas by saying "AND", rather than "BUT" or "NO".

Once the children have all agreed on the rules, the teacher can use a small drawing or symbol to illustrate each rule, in the view of the class. The same established "constitution" is used during the whole project.

Additional task: as homework, the teacher can ask students to discuss with caregivers at home what they feels is the most relevant problem in society that people can contribute to solve in their everyday lives.

3	Lesson period 2	<p>Students reflect individually on a problem in society either by writing it down or by thinking about it mentally. For example, how to stop people throwing rubbish on the floor. They are encouraged to come up with several solutions and discuss which of these might be most effective. Remind pupils on the rules established in step 1. The teacher should take care to ensure that the problem selected is not so big that it has no practical measures that people can take to help.</p> <p>Students exchange with classmates sitting next to them. Next each group of 2 gets together with another group of 2 to form groups of 4. First each previous couple summarises their discussion, then, the whole group of 4 continues to debate. After that, each group of 4 unites with another group of 4 to create groups of 8. Again, they first present their previous discussion and then the whole group continues debating.</p>	<p>There are opportunities here to link to any area of the curriculum across subjects and disciplines depending on what subjects are chosen</p> <p>Citizenship and social studies</p> <p>Reading and writing</p> <p>Foreign language: - Practicing - Reading</p>	<p>Identifying and challenging assumptions, checking accuracy and gaps in knowledge</p> <p>Considering several perspectives on a problem based on different assumptions</p> <p>Reviewing alternative theories and identifying strengths and weaknesses of evidence, arguments, and claims</p>
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	<p>After each person has spoken inside the group, each group of 8 will summarise the exchanges to the whole class. After all the groups have spoken one subject has to be chosen for the next class.</p> <p>As appropriate to the level, curriculum, and experience of the students, the teacher may choose to give students some instruction on debating techniques, how to pose questions, how to check the accuracy of claims, and other issues relevant to debating procedure.</p> <p>Additional task: as homework,</p> <p>i. Students can be invited to learn more about their subject by looking for documents and seeking information in newspaper articles, books, magazines or in the Internet with the supervision of the teacher or parents. This allows students to broaden their worldview, increase their cultural knowledge and develop their personal identity. Secondly, students can be asked to write a text with pro and con arguments for a certain solution. This serves as a preparation for the next classes.</p> <p>ii. Students can also be given a document in a foreign language to prepare for the next discussion. The discussions themselves can be also take place in a foreign language.</p>	<p>- Expression and argumentation</p> <p>Discussion and debating skills and speaking persuasively</p>	<p>Acknowledge own bias and uncertainty /limits of endorsed opinion</p>
<p>4 Lesson period 3</p>	<p>The teacher draws a line (or uses a ribbon) on the floor in order to separate the room in two parts. They hang an “agree” and a “disagree” sign at each side of the line. They announce a question that will lead to a deeper discussion over a certain problem or idea proposed in step 2. For example, if students identified how to help refugees as a subject, then it would be interesting to discuss donations and voluntary assistance. “Does helping mean donating?” Now, the possible solution can be debated. After a brief brainstorm, pick a solution that students have raised, e.g. “organising a food collection, yes or no?”</p> <p>Students physically move to the side of the line that matches their opinion. Those that cannot chose stay in the middle. Afterwards, 3 or 4 students with different opinions are interrogated. They defend their opinion by arguing and justifying their ideas. After each turn, the students are told that if they are convinced they should change their position in relation to the line</p>	<p>As above</p> <p>Debating skills</p>	<p>Reviewing their opinion and finding alternative perspectives</p> <p>Justifying and explaining strengths and limitations of an idea</p>

		In the end, once the students have expressed their ideas, it would be interesting to look at how many students changed side.		
5	Lesson period 4	<p>Students write on a piece of paper the questions they need to ask in order to further investigate the identified problem.</p> <p>They should ask between 1 and 3 questions and each question should be written on a different piece of paper. Each question will be placed in a hat and they will be randomly chosen. Students will be divided in groups of 3. The search for a solution for the problem chosen by the class could, for example, require each group of students to manage a budget by applying addition, subtraction, multiplication or division</p> <p>The teacher and the students try to answer the questions. If some questions are not answered then there may be a case to run a further investigation for the next step.</p>	<p>Deepening their knowledge and experience of the above</p> <p>Testing their knowledge of mathematics and problem-solving</p>	<p>Analysing gaps in knowledge</p> <p>Making connections to other concepts and knowledge from different disciplines</p> <p>Generating and playing with usual ideas to solve a problem</p> <p>Reflecting on the chosen problem and its possible consequences</p>
6	Lesson period 5	<p>The teacher hangs a big sheet of paper in the classroom. The problem to be considered is written in large letters in the centre of the paper.</p> <p>In order to guide the brainstorming for concrete solutions, the teacher elaborates on the problem orally and then asks the students to write 3 ideas to solve the problem on 3 different post-its (1 idea = 1 post-it). The teacher encourages them to be creative and daring in proposing new and unusual solutions. Afterwards, each student comes one by one to the board and says the 3 ideas out-loud. The teacher pastes the post-its on the board by group of ideas. After all ideas are mentioned the teacher asks them to propose still 2 more ideas for each one. The same produced is repeated at the board.</p> <p>Once all ideas have been expressed, come back to some ideas that are too general and encourage students to complete them or give more details. This will allow an individual idea to become collective. For each general idea ask for 5 precisions. For example, "how to help homeless people?". Repeat the same with 2 or 3 general ideas.</p>	<p>Deepening their knowledge of the above</p> <p>Helping them to consider their societal contribution and become aware of their role as citizens</p>	<p>Generating and playing with unusual ideas to solve a problem</p> <p>Appraising and justifying opinion on logical, ethical, or other criteria/reasoning</p>
7	Possible extension	When sharing their experience during this exercise, the students could be asked to perform an artistic production that retells the adventure lived by the class. This could be a drawing, poem, theatre piece (prepared or improvised)	Communicate the subject they have developed	Producing, performing, or envisioning a meaningful output that is personally novel

presenting their conclusions and experiences to parents, residents and the rest of the school.

## Resources and examples for inspiration

### Web and print

- Not applicable

### Other

- Chalk or tape or ribbon
- Paper
- Post-it
- Big conference paper sheet
- Any materials needed if students are asked to produce a creative output in step 7

**Creativity and  
critical thinking rubric**

• Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	<b>CREATIVITY</b> Coming up with new ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b> Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>
<b>INQUIRING</b>	Make connections to other concepts and knowledge from the same or from other disciplines	2-5	Identify and question assumptions and generally accepted ideas or practices	2-6
<b>IMAGINING</b>	Generate and play with unusual and radical ideas	2,5,6	Consider several perspectives on a problem based on different assumptions	2,3,4,6
<b>DOING</b>	Produce, perform or envision a meaningful output that is personally novel	7	Explain both strengths and limitations of a product, a solution or a theory justified on logical, ethical or aesthetic criteria	2,3,4,6
<b>REFLECTING</b>	Reflect on the novelty of solution and of its possible consequences	7	Reflect on the chosen solution/position relative to possible alternatives	3,5