

First Meeting Activities

Following is a list of activities that may prove useful for recruitment meetings at the beginning of the year. These fun activities should give the students a feel for public speaking and debate. Feel free to choose whichever you believe will be most appealing to your students.

Introduction to Debate

Here's a quick rundown of debate that you can use to tell your students what to expect.

- Debate is simply a way to argue. We can (and do) debate about everything in our day-to-day lives. What we argue about is called the debate topic. Most good topics are "should" statements. They state an opinion on what we should do.
- Here's a sample topic for debate: "All schools in Chicago should be year-round schools." This is a claim that can be both attacked and defended. Good topics always have two debatable sides. If you have trouble thinking of reasons why your claim might be wrong, it's probably not a very good topic and won't make for a very good debate (for example, "Murder should be illegal.").
- This afterschool program will allow you to learn to argue in a structured format that ensures that both sides get their arguments out. You will get to compete with other schools throughout Chicago at four tournaments over the course of the year.

Triple Speak

This fun activity allows students to practice speaking in public. It's a good way to get them comfortable with speaking.

- Have students brainstorm a series of random words (e.g. "Beauty" "Catfish" "Bill Gates" etc.) and write these on the board. Aim for 3 words per student. Feel free to add words yourself. Silliness is absolutely permitted.
- Have one student come up to the front of the room with her back to the board, speaking to the class.
 - Give her a randomly selected word from the list to begin her speech. She can say anything she'd like about the word. If the word was catfish, she might tell a story about catching a catfish or make an argument that catfish are the best fish. The point is for her to keep speaking coherently and constantly on the subject.
 - Around 30 seconds into her speech (or when she seems to be slowing down or struggling), give her another randomly selected word (e.g. "Bill Gates"). She then has to try to smoothly transition her speech to the new topic. ("...so I sold the catfish for \$200, which made me the richest girl in my house, but nowhere near as rich as Bill Gates, the richest man in the world...")
 - After 30 more seconds (or when she slows down again), give her another randomly selected word (e.g. "Beauty"). She has to try to smoothly transition her

speech to this new topic and conclude the speech (e.g. "...much like catfish, Bill Gates is beautiful, and that's what this speech is about, the ideal of beauty...").

- Repeat this process for each student in the class.
- There are no bad speeches in Triple Speak.

Brainstorm Topics

This activity lets students practice coming up with claims they can debate about.

- Brainstorm topics that interest the group and write them on the chalk/white board. Topics should be somewhat controversial statements that have two sides. "Should" statements are best.
- Examples include: "Smoking should be illegal," "School uniforms should not be required," "Junk food should be banned in school," "The US should pull out of Iraq,"... etc.

One-on-One Spar Debates

If you have students who are returning from last year, have them do spar debates as a demonstration of a fun debate for the new students.

- Split students into two groups (Affirmative and Negative)
- Choose a topic (e.g. "Junk food should be banned in schools" "Smoking should be illegal" "School uniforms should be mandatory") and have each group quickly brainstorm arguments for their side independently. To do this, you might have them gather in their groups and brainstorm a bunch of arguments for their sides. Then have each person in the group choose the three arguments they would like to present.
- Pair off students (1 affirmative, 1 negative) and have them each give short speeches (1 each, less than 2 minutes) debating each other one at a time.
- Here's how it should go:
 - The first affirmative debater will present his/her three points.
 - The first negative debater will present his/her three points and then give refutations to the affirmative's three points.
 - The second affirmative will come up and a totally new debate will begin. He/she gives her three points, which might vary a little from the other affirmative (that should be strongly encouraged).
 - The second negative gives his/her three points and refutation.
 - A totally new debate begins.
 - It continues until everyone has had their say