

Debating at Higher Levels: Teacher's Notes

This is a lesson plan for higher levels (C1+) designed to help students develop their discourse management and debating skills.

Discourse Analysis: Guardian 5-minute Debates

In this section of the lesson students will watch a video from the Guardian 5-minute debate series in order to analyse the ways in which the speakers structure their arguments and the language they use. The topic of the debate is:

- Should slang words be banned in the classroom?

In the debate the two speakers (Michael Rosen and Lindsay Johns) are specifically talking about London street slang. A school in South London took the decision to ban street slang from the classroom, the banned words are in the picture below:

If you want to look up any of these words you can use [the urban dictionary](#).

Language to pre-teach:

- **code switching** - changing from one language, dialect, or way of speaking to another depending on who you're speaking to.
- **cultural relativism** - the theory that beliefs, customs, and morality exist in relation to the particular culture from which they originate and are not absolute. (What's considered acceptable in one culture might not be in another)
- **Live in an ivory tower** - to be out of touch or to not understand the true reality of a situation. To live in a privileged position and therefore not understand the real world.

Have students watch the debate, while they are watching they should answer these questions:

- Who wins the debate and why?
- Useful phrase for debating.
- Ways of structuring an argument.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2013/dec/09/should-schools-ban-slang-video-debate>

Discuss their thoughts in open class.

Give out the transcript and show students the powerpoint. The powerpoint will take them through some of the structural techniques that Michael Rosen uses, such as:

- Conceding/partially agreeing
- Hedging/being more indirect
- Asking and answering your own questions
- Presenting evidence
- Being emphatic

A Less Formal Debate

Now tell students they're going to watch a less formal debate, the topic is dogs vs. cats. Split the class into two groups: the dog group and the cat group. Each group has to watch the video and write down the arguments that the two people give to support their animal, i.e dogs are smelly, cats are selfish.

Students watch the video and takes notes. (Video from 1:15)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqTYI2F2pgA>

Give out the debate language handout. Tell students that they are going to recreate the dogs vs. cats debate but using the language on the handout and some of the structural techniques we saw earlier. Give them 8-10 minutes to structure their arguments. The debate will follow the following structure:

Debate Structure

1. Opening statement (90 secs)
2. Cross examination (30 secs)
3. (repeat)
4. Rebuttal #1 (30 secs each)
5. Rebuttal #2 (30 secs each)
6. Closing Statements (30 secs each)

Award a winner based on the strength of their arguments and how well structured they are. The debate handout has further debate topics for future classes.