

Electoral College Philosophical Chairs Debate

Objective:

Students will debate whether the Electoral College should be kept or abolished.

Students will:

- critically read and evaluate arguments on both sides of a debate
 - choose and respectfully debate a side
 - keep an open mind to changing sides
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Resources/Materials:

- 2020election.procon.org
 - ProCon.org article "[The Electoral College: Top 3 Pros and Cons](#)"
 - ProCon.org's "[Philosophical Chairs Lesson Plan](#)" (reprinted in part below)
 - internet connection
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Preparation:

- Teachers should familiarize themselves with the philosophical chairs debate structure.
 - Reading the article and choosing a side may be assigned as homework to allow for more in-class debate time.
 - Teachers may print the article to eliminate the need for a student internet connections
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Activity:

1. Students will read the ProCon.org article "[The Electoral College: Top 3 Pros and Cons](#)"
2. After reading, students will individually pick a side to abolish the Electoral College or to keep the Electoral College.
3. Students will then debate each other using the Philosophical Chairs format, facilitated by the instructor.
 - a. Ground rules:
 - i. Students should be prepared to debate for the pro or con side, or state why they are unsure.
 - ii. Students may change sides at any time.

- iii. Debate should be respectful and students should keep open minds.
 - iv. No one may interrupt the student who is speaking.
 - v. To agree with or retort another student's position, students must first summarize the argument they are referencing.
 - vi. Students must wait until three other people have spoken before they may speak again.
- b. Activity:
- i. Have students review the chosen ProCon.org texts and any supporting texts as either a homework assignment or an in-class activity.
 - ii. Define the debate question, ground rules, and the opposing sides. Generally: pro, con, and unsure. If your class isn't particularly chatty, the unsure category can be eliminated so everyone doesn't jump in the middle to avoid talking.
 - iii. Students should choose a side of the debate and physically move to the designated side of the classroom. Ideally, pro students should stand or sit on one side and con students on the other with unsure students at one end, as if in the middle of a horseshoe formation.
 - iv. Have students debate the topic and back up their opinions using textual evidence from ProCon.org and with as much instructor facilitation as needed.
 - v. After the debate, have students reflect on the activity, either as a conversation or a written assignment, including if (and why) they changed sides, what they learned from other students and the activity itself, and how they can apply the lessons learned to other conversations.

Sources:

Teaching Channel, "Reading Like a Historian: Philosophical Chairs," teachingchannel.org (accessed Apr. 30, 2019)

Kelisa Wing, "How Philosophical Chairs Can Teach the Importance of Tolerance," blog.pearsonschool.com, Mar. 5, 2018

Evaluation:

1. Ability to debate respectfully
2. Debate participation
3. Quality of written assignment