## Four Corners Debate—Class Topic Lesson Designer: Sara Derdiger

**Course Information:**

Instructors: Derdiger Course: Language Arts Grade: 7 Level: Gen Ed.

Class Length: 50 Min. Unit: Argumentative Writing Topic: Varies by class

**Rationale:**

Students will develop an understanding of argument as a formal practice by learning what “debate” is and by participating in a “Four-Corners Debate” on their chosen class topic.

**Previous activity:**

Students argued informally about school related topics (cell phones should be allowed in schools, uniforms should be required, etc.) and decided on a class topic, which will be used to write a whole-class persuasive essay. Students were asked to complete a list of three reasons for and three reasons against their chosen class topic as preparation for this lesson.

**Specific Goals/Objectives for Today’s Lesso**n:

* Students will learn the difference between argument and debate
* Students will establish class rules for how to respectfully participate in a whole-class debate
* Students will respectfully participate in a whole class debate, acknowledging counterclaims.

**State standards (and city standards, when relevant):  
CCW7.1a:** Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

**CCW7.1b:** Establish and maintain a formal style.  
**CCSL7.1a-d:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

b. Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

c. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others’ questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

**Materials and Equipment Needed:**

Students homework (3 reasons for and 3 reasons against our class claim)  
White board  
Classroom set up for 4 corners debate (as illustrated below) with signs on each wall

**On-Task Start-up and Transition from Previous Activity (e.g., bell-ringers):**

“Yesterday we argued about some common topics related to school. I let you call out and jump from topic to topic. You all know how to argue, but you don’t yet know how to debate. That’s what we’re going to learn today. Please take out your homework.”

**Activities to Cover Goals/Objectives (and time needed, in bold type):**

1. **(5 min.)** Bell ringer
2. **(10 min.)** Difference between debate and argument
3. **(10 min.)** Establish class rules for 4-corners debate
4. **(5 min.)** Explain 4-corners debate (most students had done this activity before) and remind them of our class topic
5. **(20 min.)** 4-corners debate: Students choose whether they agree, disagree, strongly agree, strongly disagree, or are neutral regarding our class topic (students should get to choose their own classes, there should be fewer tests in schools, we should have longer passing periods, our school should be a 1:1 computer school) and move to that area of the room. The teacher asks for a volunteer to start and that student explains their position on the issue. A student in an opposing corner is then asked to respond, and so forth. At the end, students in each area of the room are asked to collaborate and come up with a “closing argument” which is heard by the teacher. The purpose is for students to convince one another, participate in a respectful and informal debate, and learn to back up their claim with logical reasoning.

**Checking to assess Student Mastery/Learning:**Student’s homework from the night before  
Participation in the debate  
Closing arguments

**Technology Inclusion:**

None

**Differentiating Instruction for Individual Student Needs:**.

Students are not required to speak out if they are uncomfortable doing so. These students will get credit for their completed homework and their ability to listen to their classmates respectfully.  
Most of this activity occurs while standing, as students are often moving from one corner to another as they are persuaded, however students with physical limitations may stay seated and can express their shift of position orally rather than physically.

**Review of Day’s Objectives:**

Students will respectfully participate in a 4-corners debate to demonstrate their understanding of formal argument.

**Homework Assignment:**

Write an introduction to a persuasive paper about our class topic, including a hook, background knowledge, 3 reasons, and a claim.

**Reflections on the lesson (What do you anticipate will work well? Potential problems?):**

Students enjoy moving around the room, participating in activities, and—most of all—argument. Many students will be excited to participate in this activity, as they have done 4-corner debates in other classes and enjoyed them.

Students who were not in class the previous day or did not do their homework could still participate, but would not be as well prepared. Some students do not like participating in large group activities, or speaking out in class. Some students are easily distracted when they are not the ones speaking.

**Lesson Reflection**

Overall, this lesson went very well in most classes. Lower level students/classes required some prompting from me to get them making productive and debatable statements or to prevent them from talking in circles or getting off topic. Students enjoyed moving throughout the classroom, engaging in conversation and debate, and doing something a little different form our usual SpringBoard lessons. Some students were distracted by their classmates during the conversation and there was a little bit of disrespect in some classes, but overall students participated respectfully and enthusiastically. I would gladly repeat this lesson and activity with other classes.