

Highly

Debatable



68 Questions Worth Arguing About

Classification Arguments

1. Is cereal a soup?
2. Is a hot dog a sandwich?
3. Is a Pop-Tart a ravioli?
4. Is water wet, or does it only make other things wet?
5. Is a straw one hole or two?
6. Is cake just sweet bread?
7. Is a taco a sandwich, or its own category?
8. Are you standing on a mountain or in a mountain?
9. Is a quesadilla a type of pizza?
10. Is a pancake a flat cake, or its own food?
11. Is soup a drink?
12. Is a bookshelf still a bookshelf if it never holds books?
13. Is a chair with one broken leg still a chair?
14. Is cereal with milk a dessert?
15. Is a smoothie a food or a beverage?
16. Is a cupcake just a small cake, or a different food entirely?
17. Is a snowman a sculpture?
18. Is a library still a library if everything in it is digital?
19. Is a puddle just a small lake?

Absurdities

1. What is the best pizza topping, and why is it wrong to disagree?
2. Is a burrito a wrap, or is a wrap a burrito?
3. Should pineapple be allowed on pizza?
4. Is ketchup on eggs acceptable?
5. Pancakes or waffles: which is the superior breakfast?
7. Is the book always better than the movie?
8. Are socks with sandals ever acceptable?
9. Do fish get thirsty?
10. Should you eat the crust first or last?

Everyday Ethics



1. Should you tell a friend their haircut looks bad?
2. Is it stealing to take extra free samples?
3. If you find \$20 on the sidewalk, is it yours?
4. Is it rude to be 5 minutes late? What about 15?
5. Should kids be paid for chores?
6. Is it worse to be the friend who is always late, or the one who always cancels?
7. Is it okay to re-gift a present?
8. If you borrow something and return it slightly worse, do you owe a replacement?
9. Is it okay to read someone's journal if they left it open on the table?
10. Should you correct a stranger's grammar?
11. Is it fair to save a seat for a friend who hasn't arrived yet?
12. Is it a spoiler if the book is a hundred years old?
13. Should a bill always be split evenly?

Hypotheticals



1. Should homework be banned?
2. Are field trips actually educational?
3. Is it better to be the oldest, middle, or youngest sibling?
4. Should students grade their teachers?
5. Is summer break too long?
6. Is handwriting still worth learning?
7. Should recess be longer than lunch?
8. Should students choose their own seats?
9. Is group work fair?
10. Do spelling tests still make sense now that autocorrect exists?
11. Are uniforms better than choosing your own clothes?
12. Is reading a graphic novel the same as reading a book?
13. Would four longer school days be better than five shorter ones?

Getting Deeper



1. Are video games a sport?
2. Is it better to be smart or kind?
3. Do animals have feelings the way people do?
4. Is losing sometimes more valuable than winning?
5. Is technology making us less patient?
6. Should everyone have to learn a second language?
7. Is it better to be a big fish in a small pond, or a small fish in a big pond?
8. Can a machine ever be truly creative?
9. Is luck real, or just a way of describing what we didn't expect?
10. Is it possible to be too honest?
11. Does a story need a happy ending to be a good story?
12. Is it more important to be interesting or to be interested?
13. Can you be close friends if you disagree?



Debate Tips

Routine

I use this routine at the beginning of every one of my 5th & 6th grade classes. I write a question or quote on the board, and we discuss. Here are the guidelines I use that can help you make it work.

1. Write it on the board before they walk in.

This allows them to get right to work when they walk in. The more interesting it is, the more they want to argue about it.

2. You must have written notes in order to contribute to the discussion.

They all really want to contribute, because arguing about pancakes and waffles is fun. Writing first accomplishes a few things: it's a writing warmup for the day ahead; it helps them organize their thoughts; it allows them to practice note-taking skills; and it sets the expectation that good class participation requires preparation.

3. Discussion rules

One person talking at a time.

When you respond to someone's argument, restate it, then respond.

Example: "You said pancakes taste better than waffles, but waffles have more surface area, so they hold more syrup."

When you restate, it forces the students to listen better, and prepares them for written arguments later.

4. Record their arguments.

Stand at the board and capture their arguments as the discussion runs. Claims on one side, support underneath, arrows where somebody answered somebody else. This does two things at once. It models the note-taking you're asking them to do, in real time. It also validates their ideas by telling them their ideas are worth writing down.



Other Ways to Use These Questions

At the Dinner Table

Pick one, read it out loud, and make everyone go around once before anyone goes twice. The "restate before you respond" rule works just as well on siblings as on students.

In the Car

The Absurdities and Hypotheticals sections are built for this. No paper, no writing step, just the questions.

Homeschooling or in Small Groups

The written step matters more here, not less, because there's no group to hide in. Have your student write a position and two reasons, then you take the other side on purpose. Argue it well, not badly. Then trade and make them argue the side you just had. All this needs is a single kid and a parent who is willing to be annoying and pedantic.

Writing Assignments

Run the discussion first. Then, while the arguments are still on the board, have them write one paragraph: state your position, give your best support, say why it matters. The discussion did the planning for them.



Games & Activities

Four Corners

Post AGREE, DISAGREE, DEPENDS, and NO IDEA in the four corners of the room. Read a question, students move to a corner, then two students from each corner defend the spot they're standing in. Fastest way to get every single kid in the room participating.

Claim Cards

Each student writes a one sentence claim on a card. Collect, shuffle, redeal. Everyone argues the claim they received, not the one they wrote.

This removes the pressure of defending a personal opinion and forces them to build reasoning from scratch. It is also the fastest cure for the student who thinks arguing means announcing what they already believe, louder.

Whistle Switch

Two minutes arguing one side. You call switch. Two minutes arguing the opposite.

This is the best single exercise in the set for showing students that evidence gets selected. They will feel themselves reaching for different facts, and you can point at that out loud when the timer stops.

Define Your Terms

For anything in the Classification section, require the class to agree on a definition before a single argument is allowed. What is a sandwich, exactly? Write the definition on the board and hold everyone to it.

Roughly half of these debates dissolve the second a definition is settled, which is its own lesson.