

Argument - debate

Debate on global climate change

Developing Argument Skills

This activity is one of a set written to improve SPU students' argument skills. There is more information on this project and on how teachers can contribute on the following web page: <http://www.scpub.org/resources/argument,1292,NA.html>.

Method

It may be necessary to remind students of the structure of an argument. The model diagram in the activity Air Pollution – regulation of car emissions which can be found on web page <http://www.scpub.org/resources/argument,1292,NA.html> would be suitable.

Towards the end of the topic, Fuels and the Global Environment, students should have a good understanding of the issues and the evidence and be able to conduct a debate on the issue. A suggested claim to start the debate is;

“We should wait until there is clear evidence that global temperature changes are due to human activity before taking action that might threaten our lifestyle.”

The paper debate is a technique that allows students to focus on the structure of the argument more carefully because they have a record. One or two such records could be discussed with the whole class at the end.

Paper debate

In each pair of students one is assigned to support the claim and the other to oppose it. One student writes down their claim and grounds. They pass the paper to the second student who writes their criticism of the grounds or assumptions and then writes down their new claim and grounds.

The paper can then go back to the first student for further rebuttal and counter-argument.

At the end students should be able to analyse the components of their debate in terms of the model.

This type of debate has become popular in the media in recent years and teachers may be able to find a relevant example.

Spoken debate

The structure would be similar to that given above except that a third student would be involved, taking notes and analysing in terms of the model.

This technique of debate focusing on the structure of argument could be used for any topic provided students have a sufficient range of information.