

## Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #42: Debate

I have worked closely now with several departments trying to help them align the ASD language arts performance standards. One thing that has become very clear to me is our lack of explicit instruction in speaking/listening. This was a weakness in my own program due to time constraints and my lack of background with teaching effective speech communication. I rationalized that I was providing a lot of informal opportunities with my students with poetry readings, getting-to-know you activities, reader's theater, group discussion, etc. What I wasn't addressing was formal speaking. I knew I needed help, so I went to my team.

We looked at the oral language standards together and purposely planned formal speeches throughout the year using the social studies and science curriculum. With each project, we decided who would teach the basic skills, in which class students would rehearse, and who would have the responsibility for the final presentations. With an interdisciplinary approach, we were able to provide more direct instruction and practice for our students. We all got the added benefit of seeing a different side to our students, and the end result was our students gained a lot of confidence in their public speaking skills throughout the year.

Now let me offer you some specifics. Debate. Lots of teachers have been asking for materials in this area. It is a natural fit with

middle schoolers because they love to argue. Don't get nervous conjuring up images from your high school debate team or the political debates we see during election years. You can make this simple and fun.

*Education World* has an entire electronic issue devoted to debate. It includes 5 lessons, which even drop down to 3rd grade. Let me give you a little blurb on each and then you can surf their informative web sites with links to everything that you need to get started.

#### ***Using Fairy Tales to Debate Ethics***

Three fairy tales (Puss in Boots, Jack and the Beanstalk, and From the Elephant Pit) challenge students to think about honesty, right and wrong, and other questions of ethics. Copies of these fairy tales are available electronically.

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/03/lp304-03.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp304-03.shtml)

#### ***Four Corners Debate***

Get kids thinking and moving. Post a controversial statement/issue for students to think about. Place signs in each corner of your room: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Tell students to go to the corner of the room based on their opinion of the controversial issue and from there, you lead them into group discussions learning how to justify their thinking, etc.

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/03/lp304-04.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp304-04.shtml)



## ***Inner Circle, Outer Circle Debate***

This is a twist on the fishbowl discussion email tip sent out last year (see tip #20 in the new teacher binder). Students listen to each other's views and write an opinion essay.

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/03/lp304-05.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp304-05.shtml)

## ***Role Play Debate***

Students assume roles of various stakeholders on issues of high interest. Working in small groups, they develop arguments together. Students experience a debate from several points of view.

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/03/lp304-02.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp304-02.shtml)

## ***Stage a Debate: A Primer for Teachers (Lincoln-Douglas Debate Format)***

Adapt the standard debate format plus ten strategies for engaging students in debate!

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/03/lp304-01.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp304-01.shtml)

