

Lesson 6

The Leaders' Debate



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What skills and techniques are important in debate?
- 2 Why should we analyze the leaders' debate and the arguments made by leaders?
- 3 Why are debates important in elections?

OVERVIEW

Election debates offer us the chance to measure the character and temperament of the candidates and hear about their ideas and positions on important issues. In order to be an informed voter, citizens should pay attention to what politicians are saying and have the tools to evaluate their statements.

In this lesson, students learn about effective debating skills, as well as faulty arguments, before analyzing the leaders' debate. In the *Consolidation* activity, students discuss the importance of debate in democracy and the need for civil discourse.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of debates in elections;
- summarize effective debating skills and techniques;
- identify different logical fallacies or faulty arguments that people may use; and,
- evaluate the arguments made by party leaders in the leaders' debate.

Starter

1. Using a brainstorming strategy, ask students what question they would ask the party leaders if they had the chance. Questions could be directed for one leader or all leaders. Encourage questions that would help students evaluate the leaders.
2. Explain to students that CIVIX asked students across Canada to submit questions for the party leaders. Seven questions were selected based on age, geography, language and common themes, and shared with the party leaders. Video responses were submitted to CIVIX and posted on the Student Vote Canada website. Review the questions and ask students which video responses they would like to watch.
3. After watching the videos, analyze the responses as a class.
 - Which leader was effective in delivering their message and why?
 - How can we evaluate the statements made by the party leaders?

Activities

1. Using Slide Deck 6 (slides 2-3), introduce the concept of a leaders' debate and discuss the planned leaders' debates for the current election.
 - A leaders' debate is an opportunity for party leaders to present their policy ideas to the public, and challenge their opponents' positions.
 - Debates allow citizens to be exposed to different political views that may be different from their own or those around them.
 - Debates have produced great moments of political history and have acted as major turning points in election campaigns.
 - Viewers often watch to see if any of the leaders' make any 'zingers' (a striking or amusing remark) or 'gaffes' (a mistake/error causing embarrassment).
2. Watch the CBC video, "Do leaders' debates change how people vote?" to review some notable moments in history, what goes into preparing for debates and whether they influence voters.
3. Have the class brainstorm a list of qualities of an effective debater. Suggested prompts: What skills and techniques are important in debate? Which are not? (Slide Deck 6, slides 4-6)

Effective debating skills and techniques: The ability to speak clearly and confidently, think quickly, clarify arguments, provide examples, use facts, maintain persuasive speech, appeal to emotions and maintain a professional tone and body language.

Poor debating habits: Losing control and expressing anger, poor listening, using faulty arguments, personal attacks, and acting unprofessional.

TEACHER NOTE:

Consider watching highlight videos from previous election campaigns to help students identify effective debating skills.

- 2019 leaders' debate (highlights) – www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm-BsV3_M
- 2011 leaders' debate (highlights) – www.cbc.ca/player/play/2045305469
- 2008 leaders' debate (highlights) – www.cbc.ca/player/play/1844959231

4. Watch the "Logical Fallacies" video as a class. Explain to students that one way to analyze the debate is to pay attention to how the leaders construct arguments. Sometimes individuals will use faulty reasoning to make a point. Using Slide Deck 6 (slides 7-14), review common types of flawed arguments (logical fallacies) and have students write down their own example for each (Activity 6.1).
 - Authoritative Argument
 - Slippery Slope
 - Appeal to Tradition
 - Personal Attack
 - False Dilemma
 - Strawman Argument
5. Have students watch the leaders' debate at home or watch select video clips of the event in the days following, and complete Activity 6.2. To prepare for the viewing, review the party leaders that will participate in the debate.

TEACHER NOTE

In their entirety, each leaders' debate may run for 90-120 minutes. The debate will be edited into several smaller segments afterwards, which will make it easier to watch in the classroom.

6. Afterwards, have students share their responses to Activity 6.2 with the rest of the class. When sharing their analysis of the leaders' debate, remind students to use evidence to support their arguments and to avoid faulty arguments, such as personal attacks.

Consolidation

Using Think-Pair-Share, have a brief closing discussion about the leaders' debate and the importance of civil discourse in democracy.

- Why is debate important in elections?
- Why should we analyze the positions and arguments made by party leaders?
- Were you able to keep an open mind through the debate, or had you already made up your mind?
- Would you watch debates in the future? How could they be reformed to increase interest?
- Why should we debate political issues in a respectful manner?

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

Consider using a TQE (Thoughts, Questions, Epiphanies) discussion protocol, which can help engage students in deeper conversations.

1. Students work in pairs or small groups. They brainstorm a list of as many thoughts, questions, and epiphanies (TQEs) as they can about the leaders' debate.
2. Each group is asked to share their top 2-3 TQEs with the class.
3. Have a whole-class discussion based on the TQEs shared.

Extended Learning

News media will report on the leaders' debate, offering accounts of what occurred. There are two main categories of media report.

- A news story, or **factual account**, will go over the events of the debate. This type of story will be as neutral as possible, and will include interviews with experts offering interpretations of what occurred. Interview subjects with contrasting views may appear in the same story to offer different perspectives.
- The second category is an **opinion-based piece**, which usually takes the form of a written column. In this case, the journalist is also the expert. A columnist will advance a first-person argument based on their opinion. This opinion should be backed up with evidence, and existing knowledge of the subject. Some columnists will use more facts than others, or source their arguments better.

In pairs or small groups, have students analyze a pair of news articles — one written by a news reporter, the other by an opinion columnist, or articles from different publications. Students may use Activity 6.3 to record responses.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch the segments of the debate in different ways to help with the analysis (muted video, audio only).• Use an application or word cloud generator to simplify the leaders' statements (e.g., www.wordclouds.com, monkeylearn.com).
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are selecting segments of the debate to watch, select questions or issues that are of interest to your students and/or the local community.• Analyze the diversity of the questions asked during the debate. Did the leaders address the concerns of different regional communities or groups? What other questions could have been asked to the leaders?
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some students may not have the ability to watch the debate at home. Consider providing time in class to watch the debate so that all students have an opportunity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Debates are a cornerstone of a healthy democracy and can contribute to a well-informed and active citizenry.

During federal elections, leaders' debates act as a platform for certain party leaders to present their ideas and policy positions and challenge their opponents' positions in a respectful and open environment. Debates ensure that citizens are exposed to a variety of political views, including positions that do not always align with their own – which is particularly important in the age of

social media. Leaders' debates provide a chance for citizens to hear directly from the leaders in an unfiltered way, without manipulation from intermediate sources.

In Canada, **federal leaders' debates** are organized by an independent commission to avoid partisan influences. The leaders' debate commission is responsible for determining the number of debates that will be held, and which political parties are invited to participate.

Debating is about using persuasive arguments and good oratory that appeal not only to our rational side, but also to our emotions. It involves reducing complex social and economic issues to simplified stories

that are easy to understand and relate to. Promises and claims are often based on facts — data, statistics and the like — but disagreements can arise regarding the interpretation of facts, as well as which facts are important at all.

In order to be an informed voter, citizens should pay attention to what politicians are saying and have the tools to evaluate their assertions. A **logical fallacy** is a type of faulty argument. This type of argument may sound convincing in the moment, but if you stop and examine it, it does not stand up to the test of logic. It is very helpful to be able to recognize a logical fallacy and not be persuaded by it.