

Lesson 7: The Leaders' Debate



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the distinction between discussion and debate?**
- 2 What skills and techniques are important in debate?**
- 3 Why should we analyze the leaders' debate and the arguments made by party leaders?**

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 skills to evaluate their statements.

In this lesson, students discuss the difference between discussion and debate. Afterwards, students learn about effective debating skills, as well as faulty arguments, before analyzing the leaders' debate. In the *Consolidation* activity, students discuss their thoughts, questions and epiphanies about the 2023 Manitoba leaders' debate.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of debates;
- 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

Discussion vs. debate

1. In small groups, have students discuss the difference between discussion and debate. Consider using a 'Conver-Stations' discussion protocol.
 - a) Place students into groups of 4-6 students and ask them to discuss the purpose and characteristics of *discussion*.
 - b) After sufficient time has passed for the discussion to develop, ask two students from each group rotate to a different group, while the other group members remain where they are. Once in their new group, ask students to discuss the purpose and characteristics of *debate*. Encourage students to share some of the key points from their last group's conversation.
2. Discuss the distinction between discussion and debate.
 - **Discussion:** an exchange of ideas, usually informal but can also be part of academic settings. The goal is to learn. Participants listen thoughtfully to one another, reflecting on their own opinions. There is a possibility that someone may change their opinion based on new knowledge.
 - **Debate:** an opportunity to defend your position, usually formal settings. The goal is to win by making the strongest and most compelling arguments. Participants listen to find faulty arguments or inconsistencies. No openness to changing sides.

Activities

1. Review the purpose of a leaders' debate (Slide Deck 7).
 - 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. As a class, brainstorm the qualities of an effective debater. Suggested prompts: What skills and techniques are important in debate? Which are not? (Slide Deck 7)

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 or frustration, poor listening, using faulty arguments, personal attacks, and acting unprofessional.

4. 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. Watch the "Logical Fallacies" video.

Then, use Slide Deck 7 to review common logical fallacies and have students write down their own example for each (Activity 7.1).

- 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 debate in class and complete Activity 7.2. To prepare for the viewing, review the party leaders that will participate in the debate.

TEACHER NOTE

The leaders' debate may run for 60-90 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 7.2 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

Use a TQE (Thoughts, Questions, Epiphanies) discussion protocol to reflect on the 2023 Manitoba leaders' debate.

- a) 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.

- b) Each group is asked to share their top 2-3 TQEs with the class.
- c) 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 types of media articles.

- 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 7.3 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. Turn on captions on the video whenever possible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

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

During 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 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.

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.