



Compendium of Resources for High School Educators

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About Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy is a nonpartisan nonprofit that works to improve the quality of research and education by promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning. The HxA community is made up of more than 5,000 professors, educators, administrators, and students who come from a range of institutions — from large research universities to community colleges. They represent nearly every discipline and are distributed throughout 49 states and across the globe.

HxA believes that rigorous, open, and respectful engagement across lines of difference is essential in separating good ideas from bad and making good ideas better. Scholars and students must develop the habits of heart (e.g., empathy, perspective taking) and mind (e.g., humility, curiosity) necessary to evaluate claims, sources, and evidence and to reason carefully and compassionately about the world. The best way to prevent orthodoxy from taking root within learning environments is by fostering three key principles: open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement.

Open Inquiry

Open inquiry is the ability to ask questions and share ideas without risk of censure. In an environment that is sufficiently open, facts, opinions, and beliefs can be explored, important innovations can be discovered and problems solved, and personal and intellectual growth can flourish.

Viewpoint Diversity

Viewpoint diversity exists when members of a group or community approach problems or questions from a range of perspectives. When a community is marked by intellectual humility, empathy, trust, and curiosity, viewpoint diversity gives rise to engaged and respectful debate, constructive disagreement, and shared progress toward truth.

Constructive Disagreement

Constructive disagreement occurs when people who don't see eye to eye are committed to exploring an issue together, acknowledging their own fallibility and the limits of their knowledge, and being open to learning something from others who see things differently than they do. Learning from our differences, and modeling how to engage despite them, is the foundation of healthy academic practice and of democratic society itself.

Introduction

Heterodox Academy spent two years (2020–2022) exploring how the values of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement manifest in high schools and examining the barriers school leaders and educators face when embedding these values in their schools. The result is this compendium, containing tools and resources, alongside other materials, created by and for educators. The goal of these resources is to help those working in high schools design classroom environments conducive to open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement and to teach these values.

HxA has concluded its exploration of K-12 education, but we hope that administrators and educators will use this compendium to continue the work of preparing young people to freely exchange ideas, ask challenging questions, explore a range of perspectives, and disagree constructively.

We encourage all who find value in the compendium to share the contents with colleagues, including fellow educators, school leaders, school board members, and district and state administrations — perhaps even printing and placing it in the lunchroom, teachers' lounge, or copy room for others who are on the fence about this work to discover and peruse.

The sections that follow explore the contents of the compendium in some detail, including the classroom activity series, which is the primary resource provided.

Perspectives from *heterodox: the blog*

HxA publishes [heterodox: the blog](#), a platform where scholars, practitioners, and those with an interest in research and education can share and read analyses, pedagogical approaches, and opinions that explore the value of open inquiry and viewpoint diversity and model constructive disagreement. The compendium begins with two blog articles — “Why K-12 Education Needs Viewpoint Diversity Now” and “Creating a Political Classroom to Reduce Political Polarization” — articulating why high schools should promote these values and how they can go about doing so. These two articles offer a primer to the tips and activities offered in this compendium.

The HxA High School Classroom Activity Series

The bulk of this compendium is a five-part series of mini-units that can be used in its entirety, from Mini-Unit One through Mini-Unit Five, or educators can choose whichever mini-unit(s) fits best within their existing

curriculum. The series is best suited for English and social studies courses offered in grades 11–12 but can easily be adapted for grades 9–10. Many of the activities described in the mini-units can also be implemented across disciplines. All standalone activities can be found in the Appendix.

The series begins with a pre-cursor for educators to prepare for implementing classroom activities that encourage open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement.

Teaching Heterodoxy in High Schools

The U.S. is a pluralistic society of people who hold a range of viewpoints on a variety of issues. An educational environment that values open inquiry allows students to explore these issues to understand why certain views are held and fosters an environment where students can learn how to disagree with any view constructively. Implementing all or portions of the mini-units described in this compendium will help the culture of high schools shift to one of true heterodoxy where competing ideas can be explored constructively and respectfully.

Research by Erin McLaughlin,² founder of Positive-Ed Consulting, shows that to engage with diverse viewpoints in a classroom, students must have intellectual humility: the ability to acknowledge that they might be wrong. They must also embrace active, open-minded thinking: the ability to actively look for and understand reasons other people’s views may differ from their own. The mini-units will help students cultivate these habits of mind.

Instilling the values of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement can help students perform well-reasoned thinking and prepares them to engage with new ideas in high school classrooms, on university campuses, in the workforce, and in their communities.

Each mini-unit has a list of objectives, but if the series is taught in its entirety, students will be able to:

- Perform analytic reading and dialogue
- Investigate what has shaped their worldview
- Differentiate between facts and beliefs
- Identify logical fallacies
- Engage in dialectical thinking

2. Griffin, E. M. (2017). Turning division into discourse: Educating adolescents about viewpoint diversity. University of Pennsylvania, Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstone Projects. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/214204924.pdf>.

A general overview of how the mini-units and associated classroom activities align with Common Core State Standards can be found in Appendix A.

Time Needed to Teach the Series

The entire series spans 29 to 42 days (not including the pre-cursor activities), assuming one day equals a 50-minute class. The maximum is nine weeks, depending on students' academic level and whether some activities are assigned for in-class work or homework. Construction of the series assumes that a teacher would implement Mini-Unit One at the start of the school year or semester.

Overview of Mini-Units of the Series

The first and second mini-units of the series introduce students to concepts and practices that encourage the values of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement. In the third mini-unit, students engage with one another to apply the concepts and practice these values. The fourth and fifth mini-units have students engage with and present opposing views to show they grasp the concepts and values.

Mini-Unit One: Understanding Terms and Critiquing an Argument

This mini-unit builds a foundation for student engagement in discussion with others by practicing how to come to terms with an author of a book and understand their arguments.

- Time: Approximately four to eight days.
- Materials: *How to Read a Book*; teacher preparation, discussion questions, and activities found in Appendices I, J, and K.

Mini-Unit Two: Why Does Free Speech Matter

This mini-unit builds a foundation for student engagement in discussion with others by presenting the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity.

- Time: Approximately nine to 15 days.
- Materials: *All Minus One*³ (freely accessible online); teacher preparation, discussion questions, and activities found in Appendices J, N, O, and P.

3. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

Mini-Unit Three: Understanding Your Worldview and the Worldview of Others

This mini-unit introduces students to the concepts of open inquiry and viewpoint diversity and has them seek to understand their own worldview and that of others.

- Time: Approximately seven to eight days.
- Materials: “Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes” ([found on YouTube](#)); discussion questions and activities found in Appendices R, S, and T.

Mini-Unit Four: Seek to Understand Opposing Points of View

This mini-unit introduces students to the concepts of “steel man” and “dialectical thinking” to help them understand and appreciate both sides of an argument.

- Time: Approximately five to six days.
- Materials: All activities can be found in Appendices U, V, W, X, Y, and Z.

Mini-Unit Five: Present Your Own Argument and an Opposing Argument

This mini-unit has students actively engage in dialogue with one another to develop arguments and present opposing views.

- Time: Approximately four to five days.
- Materials: Teacher preparation and all activities can be found in Appendices J, L, Q, and D.

Perspectives from



heterodox: the hxa blog



Why K-12 Education Needs Viewpoint Diversity Now

By Will Reusch | August 20, 2020

In the fall of 2016, before the presidential election, a ninth grader came to school wearing a Trump 2016 T-shirt. I walked into the faculty lounge that morning to get a cup of coffee and nearly a dozen teachers were standing in front of the one-way glass window, looking at him with open disgust. They were discussing how the student should best be reprimanded, or at least “re-educated,” for his politically indefensible display. Their comments included:

“Why is he wearing that?”

“Is he racist?”

“This is not ok. This is not normal.”

I interjected: “Why don’t you ask him?” My question was immediately met with head-shaking and looks that told me I clearly didn’t understand. To my colleagues, the shirt was so gross an offense that engagement served no purpose. To me, their unwillingness to talk with him was a missed opportunity to better understand the perspective of someone who saw things differently.

The tenor of the discussion around politics that I saw play out that morning — both the judgments and the refusal to engage — reveals a persistent problem in our schools. It’s a problem that extends far beyond the comments of a few teachers in the faculty lounge.

I have been a teacher for 14 years. For the past seven years, I have been at a private high school in Los Angeles. For seven years before that, I was a public high school teacher, in LA and in Philadelphia. What I’ve seen alarms me. The lack of humility on the part of educators, when it comes to teaching students about cultural, religious, political, viewpoint, and ideological diversity, has resulted in a climate that stifles learning. While all of these components are important, in recent years, the need for an understanding of political diversity has become the most salient.

I have seen a pervasive norm that conservative ideas are bad and progressive ideas are good. While this

norm may be reversed in other districts around the country, the reality is that most colleges of education (the institutions that train and produce teachers) are situated at universities that support this orthodoxy.

In my current position, I run my U.S. History, Gov-Econ, and Civics classes in a way that welcomes all political perspectives. Because of that, I have become one of the few instructors at the school students feel they can come to when their perspective doesn't perfectly align with what they feel is the "right" view. Students have come to me reporting things like "If I bash Trump in my essay, I get an A," and "If I promote building the wall, I fail." While I believe that this is, to some extent, hyperbolic, perception matters and it indicates a broader problem in primary and secondary school education. There are at least three reasons this needs our attention.

First, one of the goals of education should be to prepare students for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Fostering the ability to think about complex and controversial issues from a variety of perspectives, with an eye towards problem-solving, is a necessary part of that process.

Second, higher education has, up to this point, received the lion's share of attention on the problem of ideological conformity. But prioritizing reform only at the level of post-secondary education ignores a significant fraction of young people. The National Center for Educational Statistics [showed that](#), in 2017, "about 44 percent of high school completers enrolled in 4-year institutions and 23 percent enrolled in 2-year institutions," excluding about one-third of high school completers from any resulting advances.

Third, modeling respectful discourse has to start early if it is to become internalized. K-12 students need to observe their instructors articulating and defending various positions and exhibiting genuine and thoughtful curiosity about views different from their own. Moreover, students should see that the ability to reason through an argument and the demonstration of curiosity are desirable and valuable traits to have.

We should be training students to be critical thinkers, where critical thinking is the analysis and evaluation of an issue free of ideological and subjective judgments. This skill is rarely taught in secondary school classrooms, even though schools know how to do this, at least in principle. In fact, this approach is more frequently seen in early childhood and elementary classrooms. It's present in activities like "How many uses can you think of for a paper clip?" This type of thought exercise lays the groundwork for problem-solving and thinking outside of the box. However, at some point usually during middle school, when the topics become decidedly more controversial than paper clips, structured lessons with a specific political agenda and singular viewpoint become the norm.

A few months after that morning in the faculty lounge, I had the opportunity to speak with the student who had worn the Trump tee. He explained that he wore it partly out of pride for his conservative ideals and partly out of

frustration for the way he felt those ideals were judged in the school setting. Based on the teachers' comments I'd overheard, he was right to feel that way.

This problem of a singular ideological position in primary and secondary education is likely to intensify, at the very least in the near term. For instance, in recent weeks, students have [demanded](#) that anti-racism readings be adopted into classrooms across the country. While there are certainly merits to the anti-racist perspective, by incorporating it as a teaching tool, we're reflexively and uncritically accepting this version of the world. But this is not what education should be. After all, we shouldn't be telling young minds what to think, we should be teaching them how to think.



About the Author

Will Reusch is a High School social studies teacher who has worked in very diverse communities throughout his 17-year career. He is the host of the Cylinder Radio podcast that focuses on various perspectives on controversial topics. You can follow him on Twitter [@teecherreusch](#).

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Creating a Political Classroom to Reduce Political Polarization

Samantha Hedges | October 28, 2020

“When democracy is reduced to warring political camps, one reaction can be to keep politics out of schools; as a consequence, students are not taught how to deliberate about their differences.”

Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy published their book *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* in 2014 based on research conducted during the transition from President George W. Bush to President Barack Obama. In the introductory chapter, the authors describe how political polarization was playing out in K-12 schools at the time. Given that society has become even more polarized, revisiting their central argument that schools are, and ought to be, political sites may prove instructive for teachers thinking about ways to help their students understand and engage with the political landscape of our times. Students in K-12 schools *will* encounter opposing views and need to prepare for participation in a democratic society, and the political classroom is one that helps students develop their ability to deliberate political questions. Hess and McAvoy provide actionable steps for how to best set up a classroom that encourages open inquiry, deliberation, and dialogue across differences to achieve effective discussion of political and controversial topics.

Based on school and classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and pre- and post-course surveys of students in three states — Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin — at a total of 21 schools, Hess and McAvoy shed light on how political classrooms are structured, and how deliberation can be organized and encouraged among students with diverse perspectives.

The authors articulate the aims of a political classroom by first outlining what they are not. The aims are never neutral because they represent the purposes and values that undergird schooling. Second, the aims are not the same as outcomes. Outcomes are observable skills and behaviors that can be assessed, which are necessary, but to achieve literacy, for example, students must develop an appreciation for text and the skill of argumentation. Third, aims are different from content. Courses usually have a particular set of skills and information that students are expected to master as part of a class, but teachers should also teach students to “think like a historian” for example, which would require them to look at primary sources and engage in historical debate.

For Hess and McAvoy, the six aims of the political classroom allow students to develop an appreciation for key democratic principles that are necessary for students to have meaningful political discussions. For example, encouraging students to deliberate as equals helps them understand the principle of *political equality* — that all citizens should be allowed to contribute to decision-making. Teaching students the knowledge and skills to make well-reasoned decisions and engage in deliberation, where they will encounter views that are different from their own, reflect and respond when their views are interrogated, consider relevant evidence, and practice argumentation, fosters their *autonomy* and their appreciation for the values of liberty and freedom. Asking students to consider their personal positions on policy questions in relation to those of their peers’ helps them understand *political tolerance* and the importance of protecting reasonable views even if others find them objectionable. Similarly, providing students the space to articulate why they hold particular views, listen, and reconsider their preferences in light of other people’s concerns and rights helps them develop the principle of *fairness* and prepares them to enter conversations with the intention of finding the best solution. Fostering student understanding of competing ideologies underlying controversial issues and competing views about democracy will help them place the arguments they hear and their own views into the larger political picture to achieve *political literacy*, which includes weighing evidence and understanding how issues align with fundamental disagreements about the ideal democratic system. Finally, encouraging students to be informed and concerned about particular issues and political outcomes develops their interest in democratic activities, which is a crucial starting point to develop the principle of *political engagement* — a central aim of the political classroom.

Best Practice Discussion: The Ideal Political Classroom

Based on their research, Hess and McAvoy recommend what they call the “best practice discussion” as the ideal political classroom. In this type of classroom, students engage in discussion of controversial political issues more than 20% of the time. These discussions involve students preparing in advance, significant student-to-student talk, and high levels of student participation.

The best practice discussion classroom is the ideal for preparing students to engage in civil political talk in adulthood. The researchers found that best practice discussion classes were better suited to teach political talk because they socialized “students into seeing disagreement as a normal part of democratic life, while students in lecture classes were left to assume that most people agree about political issues.” The students in these classes noted that they appreciated hearing the views of their peers and reported that these interactions contributed to their learning. Students in best practice discussion classrooms were much more likely to articulate the importance of considering other points of view before making decisions than students in teacher-led discussion or lecture classes.

The teachers of best practice classrooms challenged the pitfalls associated with divisive and simplistic thinking and were successful in teaching a habit of open-mindedness. They modeled and taught the norms of civil discourse by structuring activities so that students had multiple opportunities for practice. This approach to teaching is best illustrated by one case study the authors describe: Mr. Kushner.

A Case of Political Friendship

Hess and McAvoy describe three case studies to illustrate their findings, but *Mr. Kushner: A Case of Political Friendship* merits our attention because his best practice political classroom addressed the two challenges that are top-of-mind in schools today: political polarization and social inequality. The authors outline how Mr. Kushner addressed these topics by describing the norms, culture, and teaching methods of his Contemporary Controversies high school course. The course was an elective and non-tracked — i.e., open to all students — and enrolled students from diverse socio-economic and racial backgrounds and academic trajectories. Notably, participants indicated in the survey that the school population leaned politically left and mentioned in interviews that the town was a “liberal town;” thus, ideological diversity was lacking in the school and Mr. Kushner’s class.

Mr. Kushner’s priority, as identified by the researchers, was to structure learning to promote the principles of political tolerance and fairness, which the researchers framed as political friendship. He wanted students to move from holding views based on self-interest to considering how fellow citizens are affected by various policies. Furthermore, he wanted students to think about policies as “binding to the rest of society” so that students would consider what costs they are passing on to others when they hold particular views and advocate particular positions. Disagreement among students often involved adding nuance to politically left ideas; because of this, Mr. Kushner structured activities so that conservative views would be included in the discussion. Notably, the academic diversity of a non-tracked course meant that some students were more prepared for the demands of discussion than others. This dynamic, along with the racial and socio-economic diversity of the class, meant that Mr. Kushner needed to artfully create a climate that fostered trust.

Classroom Norms and Structure to Develop a Climate of Trust

Mr. Kushner did a variety of things in his class to construct a positive classroom conducive to political talk. He centered classroom instruction around discussion; gave students the power to determine which controversial issues would be covered; fostered relationship-building among students; established a classroom culture of fairness and civility; purposefully introduced viewpoint diversity into course content; and retained the human element of politics. I outline these norms as described by the researchers to provide a guide for developing

a classroom conducive to balanced and respectful discussion of political issues. The researchers did not assert that Mr. Kushner's class was perfect in achieving the aims of a political classroom, but his approach was aspirational.

Course structure:

- Desks were arranged in a U-shaped formation. This could take the form of “gallery view” in Zoom classrooms.
- There was heavy emphasis on discussion, and class time was spent moving between small- and large-group activities, watching documentaries, and doing research.
- There were no textbooks.
- The class generated a list of about 20 contemporary controversies, then students voted for the ones they most wanted to investigate.
- As long as they were civil, Mr. Kushner only interjected with probing questions to elaborate or clarify—discussion was both a skill that was being developed and a tool for learning course content.

Relationships:

- Kushner met one-on-one with students throughout the course and held a “social day” once a semester in which students brought food, were instructed to talk to classmates they didn't know, and developed discussion questions.
- The class had a “we” dynamic. The students learned from their peers and experienced political talk within a democratic community that was structured to encourage conversation across social differences.

Classroom culture:

- Kushner modeled civility through his teaching and countered the prevailing view that those who disagree are “crazy.”
- Students were expected to be civil and fair with each other, and participation was encouraged.
- Students were encouraged to be candid, but flippant remarks, such as calling an idea “dumb,” was not tolerated.

Viewpoint diversity:

- Readings presented competing points of view, which included newspaper articles, internet resources, and Supreme Court cases.

- Debates were structured to deviate from issues that were “peg-holed ideologically;” for example, instead of focusing on the abortion divide between pro-choice and pro-life, Mr. Kushner focused on whether the father should be informed if a woman chooses to have an abortion.
- Kushner played devil’s advocate and did not reveal his personal views. As a result, students reported that his class was one of the few where they actually learned both sides. Students enjoyed not knowing what the teacher thought because then the curriculum seemed more open to investigation, which made the class more challenging and engaging.

Humanism:

- Kushner brought in guest speakers to expose students to different views. He did this not to change their minds, but to give them an authentic political experience of engaging in discussion with someone who holds a different position and to practice listening and responding in ways that promote goodwill and respect.

Political Classrooms to Reduce Political Polarization

Hess and McAvoy present concrete proposals for schools and teachers regarding how to create the conditions for political classrooms to flourish. The goal of a political classroom is to be as authentic as possible to the real-world political environment, while teaching students how to engage civilly without succumbing to the polarization that often marks political talk. The researchers provide five recommendations for how to effectively construct political classrooms:

1. Teachers should be treated like professionals. The researchers noted that teachers who were treated as professionals were granted substantial authority, expected to deliberate with colleagues to make curricular decisions, provided high-quality opportunities for professional development, and held accountable for the quality of their decisions and for what students were learning.
2. Teachers should be aware and continuously learning about what is happening in their fields. Political classrooms emphasize teaching students how to discuss controversial issues that are authentic to contemporary politics. These issues are constantly changing; thus, teachers need to stay abreast of the issues.
3. Teachers should clearly articulate their educational aims for their students. Skillful teachers align their pedagogical approaches and curriculum toward the development of aims that match the school context, and they are thoughtful about the democratic values and dispositions they intend to develop in their students.

4. Teachers should work as a part of a team to construct curriculum, not simply deliver someone else's content as autonomous actors. Professionals learn with and from their colleagues about how best to approach educational aims, content, and skills; thus, teachers should engage in genuine deliberation about what and how to teach with colleagues.
5. Teachers bear much of the responsibility of creating a political classroom, but the support of administrators is key. The researchers noted that successful teachers reported little pushback from parents and other community members when they included controversial political issues in their classes because they had the support of their department chairs and principals.

These recommendations and the insights from Mr. Kushner's class provide useful guidance for how to develop a political classroom. Having political classrooms at the K-12 level lays the groundwork for students to enter higher education and the workforce with a deeper sense of the role of citizens in a democracy. As a result of these classrooms, young people will be armed with the skills necessary to have discussions that are less polarizing and more constructive, which is vital to improve dialogue and democratic decision-making in the public and political spheres of society.



About the Author

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HxA High School Classroom Activity Series

Teacher Preparation for Student-Centered Discussion

The purpose of this pre-cursor is to prepare secondary school (high school) teachers to include potentially controversial issues and discussion-based activities in their classroom. By executing the activities in this pre-cursor, teachers will:

1. Understand the value of introducing controversial issues into classroom discussions and activities.
2. Be prepared to handle moral disagreements that may arise because of including discussions of controversial issues in the classroom.
3. Know how to structure (physically and pedagogically) the classroom environment so it is conducive to activities that will encourage open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement.

Read and Discuss *The Case for Contention*

In *The Case for Contention: Teaching Controversial Issues in American Schools*⁴, Jonathan Zimmerman and Emily Robertson historically analyze the extent to which controversial issues have been taught or avoided in classrooms. They follow this with a philosophical analysis of the value of contention in discourse to “show that one of the best things American schools can do is face controversial topics head-on” to “prepare students for lives as democratic citizens.”

This book helps administrators and teachers understand the value of including discussion of controversial issues in curriculum. After reading the book, discuss the book's content with colleagues using the *Case for Contention* discussion guide (Appendix B), if possible.

Establish an Environment Conducive to “The HxA Way”

Adopt “[The HxA Way](#)” as classroom norms. The norms can be posted in classrooms to alert students to what is expected of them and what they can expect from the teacher. By adopting The HxA Way, teachers and students will be expected to do the following when engaging in discussion:

1. Make your case with evidence.
2. Be intellectually charitable.
3. Be intellectually humble.

4. Zimmerman, J., & Robertson, E. (2017). *The case for contention: Teaching controversial issues in American schools*. University of Chicago Press.

4. Be constructive.
5. Be yourself.

Create a Political Classroom

Creating a political classroom is one way to embed The HxA Way into classrooms. A political classroom helps students develop their ability to deliberate political issues to answer the question: how should we live together? Political classrooms are student-centered, discussion-based, and focused on a current matter of public debate in which students are required to take on a perspective.

Follow the guide “How to Create a Political Classroom” (Appendix C and D) for tips on how to: (1) create a student-centered classroom, (2) develop discussion-based activities, (3) focus on controversial topics, (4) prepare students for discussion, (5) require students to take on a perspective, and (6) engage the community in discussion-based activities. The guide also recommends discussion-based activities and tips for how to assess discussion-based activities.

Prepare to Navigate Moral Disagreement

Some controversial issues that will arise in the classroom have moral implications. In *The Case for Contention*, Zimmerman and Robertson describe these issues as maximally controversial. And, according to Musa al-Gharbi, when people feel threatened or cornered by the evidence, rather than conceding, they often kick debates into the moral sphere. As such, teachers should read the tip sheet, “How to Navigate Moral Disagreements” (Appendix E), before discussing issues that may be construed as controversial.

Write Student Learning Outcomes

As part of envisioning your political classroom and creating a curriculum to achieve the goals of a political classroom, develop student learning outcomes that will clearly articulate what you want your students to learn. The learning outcomes should state your intentions for the curriculum and associated units and lessons in clear and measurable ways that will enable you to evaluate the success of the curriculum against those intentions.

Follow the guide “Writing Student Learning Outcomes” (Appendix F) for tips on creating learning outcomes that encourage open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement.

Introduce Students to the Series

Before teaching the mini-units of this series, spend approximately two weeks on the following activities: “OpenMind,” “This is Water,” and “Create a ‘We’ Dynamic in the Classroom.” Whether you are teaching the entire series or choosing one or two mini-units, these activities will:

- Provide an opportunity for students to become acquainted on a more intimate level, which will help them feel more comfortable engaging in open inquiry and encountering diverse viewpoints.
- Prepare students for the intellectual humility required to engage in open inquiry.
- Equip students with the mindset and skillset to communicate constructively across differences.

Below is a table of a recommended calendar for completing these activities.

OpenMind

Have your class complete the [OpenMind](#) program. OpenMind has students explore the inner workings of their minds and the psychological roots of our differences. It provides students with practical, evidence-based skills to communicate constructively across differences.

OpenMind is most effective when done as a whole class at the start of the semester/school year. But if you don't have two weeks to spend on these activities at the start of the semester/school year, you can cut out OpenMind entirely — as some aspects of the program are covered at other points in the series — or you can spread out the activities across the semester.

This is Water

Have students watch the video version of David Foster Wallace's commencement speech, "[This is Water](#)." The video accompanied the commencement speech that Wallace delivered to the 2005 graduating class of Kenyon College.

After watching the video, ask students: What is the central message of Wallace's commencement speech? Then discuss the central message: A real education teaches you how to think and pay attention. If you are automatically sure you know what reality is or what is true, you might not consider other points of view. Being intellectually humble and aware opens the opportunity to learn from others, not necessarily to change your mind about your views, but to understand the views of others better.

Create a “We” Dynamic in the Classroom

Spend a day having pairs of students complete the activity “Creating Connection to Generate Deep Discussion” (Appendix G and H). The activity takes 45 minutes to complete. You can also extend this activity over several days so that students complete the activity with as many classroom peers as possible.

Time

Plan to spend roughly two weeks setting the stage for the lessons to come.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Go over syllabus Watch and discuss “This is Water” Introduce OpenMind Assign Lesson 1 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students and have them complete “Creating Connections” Assign Lesson 2 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students with new partners and have them complete “Peer-to-Peer Discussion 1” of OpenMind Assign Lesson 3 of Open Mind for homework	Pair students with a new partner and have them complete “Creating Connections” Assign Lesson 4 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students with new partners and have them complete “Peer-to-Peer Discussion 2” of OpenMind Assign Lesson 5 of OpenMind for homework
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Pair students with a new partner and have them complete “Creating Connections” Assign Lesson 6 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students with new partners and have them complete “Peer-to-Peer Discussion 3” of OpenMind Assign Lesson 7 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students with a new partner and have them complete “Creating Connections” Assign Lesson 8 of OpenMind for homework	Pair students with new partners and have them complete “Peer-to-Peer Discussion 4” of OpenMind	Recap the first two weeks Introduce the mini-unit(s) of the series you plan to teach; discuss how OpenMind prepares them for the unit(s)

The HxA High School Classroom Activity Series, including “Teacher Preparation for Student-Centered Discussion,” Mini-Units One through Five, and the “Culminating Activity,” was originally published on [Heterodox Academy’s website](http://heterodoxacademy.org).

Mini-Unit One: Understanding Terms and Critiquing an Argument

This mini-unit builds a foundation for student engagement in discussion with others. By practicing how to come to terms with an author of a book and understand their arguments, students will be better prepared to exercise these skills when engaging in dialogue.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Be able to identify important words utilized by an author of a book.
- Be able to reconstruct arguments that authors present.
- Be able to critique arguments that authors make to take a stance: agree, disagree, suspend judgement.

This mini-unit will prepare students to understand arguments presented in text or orally.

Time

Plan to spend 4 to 8 days (50 minutes per day) on this mini-unit. Spend one day on the discussion questions and three days on the activities, adding more time if needed. This timeline assumes that students will read the designated chapters at home. If the chapters are read in class, add the appropriate number of days.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<p>Warm-Up Activity: Pose series of questions</p> <p>(Students read <i>How to Read a Book</i> at home)</p> <p>Teach about the stages for analytic reading and how to be a demanding reader</p> <p>Discuss questions from "Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: What are the three stages of analytic reading?</p> <p>Continue Day 1, if necessary</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: How can you be a demanding reader?</p> <p>Re-read chapter 8 of <i>How to Read a Book</i></p> <p>Activity 1 from "Classroom Activities: <i>How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading</i>"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: What does it mean to come to terms with an author?</p> <p>Re-read chapter 9 of <i>How to Read a Book</i></p> <p>Activity 2 from "Classroom Activities: <i>How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading</i>"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: How do you identify the important sentences in a book?</p> <p>Re-read chapter 9 of <i>How to Read a Book</i></p> <p>Activity 3 from "Classroom Activities: <i>How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading</i>"</p>

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled “How Do You Read a Book,” outlines the activity for the first day of the mini-unit. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the “time” table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s).

How Do You Read a Book?

Ask students to describe how they read a book: How do you ensure that you understand the language of the author? How do you determine the author’s message? How do you decide if you agree or disagree with the author? What are your criteria for a good book?

How to Read a Book

Before engaging students in this mini-unit, read the introduction to “Discussion Guide & Classroom Activities: *How to Read a Book*,” titled “Book Discussion Guide & Classroom Activities” (Appendix I). The introduction will provide you with background information about *How to Read a Book: The Classical Guide to Intelligent Reading*⁵ and the learning outcomes for the discussion questions and activities accompanying the book.

Purchase Copies of the Book

The discussion questions and activities in this guide are based on the instructions for reading for understanding set forth by the authors of *How to Read a Book*. Having students read the recommended sections of the book outlined in the guide is ideal, but the discussion questions are designed to be applied to any book. If purchasing a copy of the book for each student is impossible, have your students apply the skills of analytic reading described in the guide — “Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers” (Appendix J) — to another non-fiction book. The first level discussion questions (numbered) can be asked of any book.

Prior to Reading

The “Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers” introduces what the authors of *How to Read a Book* consider the highest goal of reading: analytic reading. Your students will read about the stages of analytic reading in *How to Read a Book* but reiterate these stages through direct instruction. In addition, follow the guide to instruct students in “how to be a demanding” reader.

5. Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Simon and Schuster.

Discussion Questions

After your students have read the assigned sections of the book, chapters 5–12, pose the discussion questions to the entire class using the Socratic seminar method. In a Socratic seminar, desks are arranged in a circle or U-shape, and the teacher poses the discussion questions, but they are not the center of questioning. A successful seminar involves students asking each other questions with the teacher only stepping in as facilitator to pose focus questions and bring the discussion back to the book if it veers off course.

Classroom Activities

The activities in “Classroom Activities: *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*” (Appendix K) are specific to *How to Read a Book* but can be modified to apply to any non-fiction book.

Students should re-read chapters 8–10 in class (either as a class, in small groups, or independently). Then complete activities 1–3 as independent work.

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Two has students apply what they learned from *How to Read a Book* to an edited version of John Stuart Mill’s “On Liberty,” *All Minus One*.

Mini-Unit Two: Why Does Free Speech Matter

This mini-unit builds a foundation for student engagement in discussion with others by presenting the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity. The focus of this mini-unit is *All Minus One*⁶, an edited version of John Stuart Mill's essay "On Liberty." Mill's three arguments for free speech and viewpoint diversity are presented and illustrated in *All Minus One*. By understanding the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity, students will be better prepared to engage in dialogue with people who hold a diverse range of viewpoints.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Be able to come to terms with an author.
- Understand the three central arguments presented by Mill for free speech.
- Be able to illustrate Mill's three central arguments for free speech.

This mini-unit applies lessons from *How to Read a Book* presented in Mini-Unit One. If Mini-Unit One was not taught, review pages one and two of "Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers" (Appendix J) to share with your students how to be a demanding and analytic reader.

Time

Plan to spend 9 to 15 days (50 minutes per day) reading and discussing *All Minus One*. *All Minus One* is a complicated text. The amount of time spent reading and discussing the text will depend on students' reading level (9th- and 10th-grade students will require more time to read and digest the text than 11th- and 12th-grade students). The primary focus should be on ensuring that students understand Mill's three arguments for free speech.

6. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Warm-Up Activity: "On Being Wrong" (see below)	Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities	Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities	Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities	Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities
Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Read <i>All Minus One</i>
Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill"	Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill"	Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill"	Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stu- art Mill"	Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stu- art Mill"
Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	
Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities	Warm-Up Activity: Recap the previous day's activities	Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: What illustration or argument presented in <i>All Minus One</i> resonated with you most?	Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: How would you illustrate <i>All Minus One</i> ?	
Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Read <i>All Minus One</i>	Activity: "Discussion Guide: <i>All Minus One</i> "	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	
Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill"	Activity: "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill"			
Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"	Activity: "Understanding <i>All Minus One</i> through Illustrations"			

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled "On Being Wrong," outlines the activity for the first day. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the "time" table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s). Because the pace of reading *All Minus One* will depend on the skill level of your class, the "recap the previous day's activities" will depend on where you are at in the book on that day.

On Being Wrong

Start this mini-unit by having students share with a conversation partner one time that they were wrong about something. Then have students watch the TED Talk "[On Being Wrong](#)" by Kathryn Schulz. After watching the talk, pose the questions: What does being wrong feel like? How do you know that you are wrong? According to Schulz, what three assumptions do we have about people who disagree with us? Have you ever had the same assumptions about people who disagree with you?

Tell students: Most of us do everything we can to avoid being wrong. But to find truth, we must step outside of the space of rightness, and be able to say, "Maybe I'm wrong." In this mini-unit we will read *All Minus One* to understand John Stuart Mill's three arguments for free speech and viewpoint diversity to seek truth.

Read *All Minus One*

Read *All Minus One* as a class. While reading the text, follow the guide "Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill" (Appendix N) to help students understand the important words that Mill utilizes. And pose questions about the illustrations from "Understanding *All Minus One* through Illustrations" (Appendix O) to help students understand Mill's arguments while they read.

Plan to spend a minimum of two days reading and discussing each of Mill's three arguments. This suggestion is for high-level readers. Average or low-level readers will likely need more time to read and grasp the content.

Discuss *All Minus One*

After reading *All Minus One* in its entirety, use the Socratic seminar method to pose the discussion questions found in "Discussion Guide: '*All Minus One*'" (Appendix P). In a Socratic seminar, desks are arranged in a circle or U-shape, and the teacher poses the discussion questions, but they are not the center of questioning. A successful seminar involves students asking each other questions with the teacher only stepping in as facilitator to pose focus questions and bring the discussion back to the book if it veers off course.

Illustrate Mill's Arguments

To assess student understanding of the three arguments for free speech presented by Mill, and the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity, have them create their own illustrations of Mill's arguments. Instructions for this activity are located at the end of the discussion guide "Understanding *All Minus One* Through Illustrations."

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Three has students practice engaging with someone who holds a view different from their own, helps students understand their worldview and the difference between facts and beliefs, and further develops their understanding of the importance of free speech and viewpoint diversity and introduces the concept of open inquiry.

Mini-Unit Three: Understanding Your Worldview and the Worldview of Others

This mini-unit introduces students to the concept of open inquiry and teaches them to engage with their own worldview and the worldview of others.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Be able to listen to perspectives that differ from their own.
- Be able to articulate their worldview and the factors that shape it.
- Be able to differentiate between facts and beliefs.
- Understand the importance of broadening the scope of accepted speech.

This mini-unit will prepare students to engage in discussion with a diverse range of perspectives in an environment that welcomes open inquiry.

Time

Plan to spend 7 to 8 days (50 minutes per day) on this mini unit. The number of days depends on whether you assign independent activities as in-class work or homework.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Warm-Up Activity: "Everyone Has a Worldview" (see below) Activity: "Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With" (Optional if students complete the above activity for homework) Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: Before We Begin"	Warm-Up Activity: Have students reflect on interviewing someone they disagree with Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: Building Community Through Viewpoint Diversity" Activity: "Discussion Questions" Activity: "What is Your Worldview?"	Warm-Up Activity: Have students reflect on the activity, "What is your worldview?" Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: The Problem of Unintentionally Treating Beliefs as Facts" Activity: "Discussion Questions" Activity: "Facts versus Beliefs"	Warm-Up Activity: Have students reflect on the difference between facts and beliefs Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: The Problem of Excess Social Penalties" Activity: "Discussion Questions"	Warm-Up Activity: Have students reflect on the downsides to excessive social penalties Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: The Problem of Telling People to Stay in their Lane" Activity: "Discussion Questions" Activity: "Don't Stay in Your Lane"

Day 6	Day 7
Warm-Up Activity: Have students reflect on the activity, "Don't Stay in Your Lane"	Warm-Up Activity: Have students recount the lesson of "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes"
Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: The Problem with Relying on Science to Bridge Our Divides"	Activity: "Develop a Value Statement for our School"
Activity: "Discussion Questions"	Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: Summary"
Video: "Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: Putting the Lessons into Practice"	
Activity: "Discussion Questions"	

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled "Everyone Has a Worldview," outlines the activity for the first day of the mini-unit. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the "time" table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s).

Everyone Has a Worldview

Start this mini-unit by having students watch the TEDx Talk, "[Why I, as a black man, attend KKK rallies](#)" by Daryl Davis. After watching the video, ask students the following question: What was Daryl Davis' message? What is the main point of his talk? How did he come to understand the worldview of someone who thinks differently than he does? What tip or tips did he share that you can use in your life?

Following the discussion of the video, share with students the objectives of this mini-unit. Then introduce the activity, “Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With.” Like Daryl Davis did, students will sit down and listen to the perspective of someone who holds a view that is in opposition to their own.

Interview Someone You Disagree With

“Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With” (Appendix R and S). The activity requires students to either interview a classmate or family member — the teacher can choose which — to practice listening to a perspective that differs from their own. The activity is designed to help students feel more comfortable hearing diverse viewpoints, which will prepare them for later activities that require two-way dialogue. The activity can be completed at home or in class, but plan to have students discuss their experience conducting the activity in class.

If you are assigning “Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With” for homework, introduce *Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes* by showing and discussing the introduction video, “Before We Begin.”

Beyond Bigot and Snowflakes

Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes is a [series of YouTube videos](#). Each video focuses on a different topic, but they should be viewed in order as the videos build on one another. The video series and accompanying “Discussion Questions and Activities” (Appendix T) can be split across six days.

Utilize the Socratic seminar method for whole-class discussion of the questions. In a Socratic seminar, desks are in a circle or U-shape, and although the teacher poses the questions, they are not the center of questioning. A successful seminar involves students asking questions of each other with the teacher only stepping in as facilitator to pose focus questions and to bring the discussion back to the videos if it veers off course.

Day one (may require an additional day):

- Video: “Building Community Through Viewpoint Diversity”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions
- In-class activity: What is Your Worldview? Reel Worksheet
- In-class activity or homework: Essay utilizing the reel of their worldview

Day two:

- Video: “The Problem of Unintentionally Treating Beliefs as Facts”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions
- In-class activity: Facts versus Beliefs

Day three:

- Video: “The Problem of Excess Social Penalties”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions

Day four:

- Video: “The Problem of Telling People to Stay in their Lane”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions
- In-class activity: Don't Stay in Your Lane

Day five*:

- Video: “The Problem of Relying on Science to Bridge Our Divides”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions
- Video: “Putting the Lessons into Practice”
- In-class activity: Discussion Questions

Day six:

- In-class activity: Develop a Value Statement for Our School (Video 6 classroom activity)
- Video: Summary

*Day five consists of watching videos and discussing them — there are no in-class activities for this day. To make day five more interactive, consider assigning the discussion questions to small groups or pairs of students, rather than having students discuss the questions as a whole class.

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Four has students practice steel-manning viewpoints that are in opposition to their own and engaging in dialectical thinking.

Mini-Unit Four: Seek to Understand Opposing Points of View

This mini-unit introduces students to the concepts of “steel man” and “dialectical thinking” to help them understand and appreciate both sides of an argument.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Understand issues more completely and accurately.
- Understand their own views and the views of others.
- Be able to identify fallacious arguments.
- Be able to have more productive dialogue.

This mini-unit asks students to work independently and with their peers to determine the argument of the opposing side, which will help them better understand their own views and, if warranted, change their mind. In addition, this mini-unit helps students with a diverse range of worldviews get along with each other better.

Time

Plan to spend approximately 5 to 6 days (50 minutes per day) completing this mini-unit. The number of days depends on how long you spend on each activity and whether you assign activities as in-class work or homework.

Although some of the activities can be completed at home, if they are assigned as homework, allot time to discuss them in class. Engaging in these activities may be the first time that students have been asked to articulate a viewpoint they do not hold. Providing a time for students to debrief in class will help them strengthen their ability to engage in this process.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<p>Warm-Up Activity: "Elephant and Rider" (see below)</p> <p>Activity: "Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Did you think about logical fallacies after class? Did you notice them used in shows, on social media, etc.?</p> <p>Continue discussion of logical fallacies and completion of activity</p> <p>Activity: "Seeking Disconfirmation"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: On your "Seeking Disconfirmation" worksheet, what did you write as a next step for understanding an opposing view?</p> <p>Activity: "Challenging Our Political Biases"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: In your "Challenging Our Political Biases" assignment, how did it feel writing a supporting argument for a view you disagree with?</p> <p>Activity: "Dialectical Thinking"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Reflect on the "Dialectical Thinking" activity, what was difficult about that activity, and what was easy about it?</p> <p>Discussion questions: "Dialectical Thinking"</p>

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled "The Rider and the Elephant," outlines the activity for the first day of the mini-unit. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the "time" table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s).

The Elephant and the Rider

To start this mini-unit, have students watch the short YouTube video, "[Elephant and Rider](#)." After showing the video, reiterate to students that the elephant, which represents our emotions, often overpowers the rider, representing logic and reason. Then ask this question: When trying to persuade someone, what should you appeal to, the rider or the elephant?

Then tell students: In this unit, the goal is to better understand our own views and the views of others, which might be in opposition to our own. To do this successfully, we must try to control our elephants, our emotions.

Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies

Before implementing these activities, teach students about logical fallacies using the guide “Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies” (Appendix U). Students will need to understand the “straw man” fallacy for activities in this mini-unit. Still, as students engage in dialogue and develop arguments, they need to be aware of other fallacies. This awareness will help them pinpoint logical fallacies in the arguments of others and avoid them when developing their own arguments.

The guide provides definitions and examples of common logical fallacies that can be taught to students, and the guide ends with an activity for students. The activity has students develop cards of logical fallacies, including an image and definition for each fallacy, to hang around the classroom. Having the logical fallacies displayed will help remind students how to make sound, evidence-based arguments when engaging in relevant activities.

Seeking Disconfirmation

Start this activity by reminding students of the logical fallacy of straw man, then introduce them to the inverse argument, steel man. The definitions and examples are found in “Introduction: ‘Seeking Disconfirmation’ & ‘Challenging Our Political Biases’” (Appendix V). Introduce and teach these terms through any means that best suits students’ needs — e.g., present the definitions and examples through direct instruction then have students provide their own examples.

After students grasp the terms, have them complete the activity “Seeking Disconfirmation” (Appendix W). The worksheet can be completed independently or with a partner. Having students complete the activity on their own may be more beneficial because breaking down specific ideologies and perspectives can often feel like a personal journey.

This activity will prepare students to steel man an argument, which they will be asked to do in “Challenging Our Political Biases” (Appendix X).

Challenging Our Political Biases

After students have completed the activity “Seeking Disconfirmation,” have them complete the activity “Challenging Our Political Biases.” Like with “Seeking Disconfirmation,” this activity can be completed in pairs or as independent work, but having students complete it as independent work may be more beneficial. Students will have an opportunity to work with others on a similar task in the following activity, Dialectical Thinking.

Dialectical Thinking

Before teaching about dialectical thinking, read the “Instructor Suggestions: Dialectical Thinking Classroom Activity” (Appendix Y).

Teach about the importance of dialectical thinking by presenting the information provided on page 1 of “Classroom Activity: Dialectical Thinking” (Appendix Z). Use a presentation style that works best for students but spend time providing examples to students and eliciting examples from them.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to complete the activity on page 2 of “Dialectical Thinking.” Either on the same day or the following day, engage the whole class in a discussion of the reflection questions found on page 3 of “Dialectical Thinking.”

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Five, the final mini-unit in this series, has students actively engage with one another to define the terms they use, develop an argument, present an argument, and steel man the arguments of others.

Mini-Unit Five: Present Your Own Argument and an Opposing Argument

This mini-unit has students actively engage in dialogue with one another to develop arguments and present opposing views.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Be able to come to a mutual understanding with a conversation partner on terms.
- Be able to develop an argument with a conversation partner.
- Be able to present an argument.
- Be able to steel man the arguments of others.

By completing the activities in this mini-unit, students should feel more comfortable constructing and presenting their own arguments as well as constructing and presenting an opposing view.

Time

Plan to spend approximately 4 to 5 days (50 minutes per day) on this mini-unit.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Warm-Up Activity: "Meeting the Enemy" (see below) Teach the stages of analytic reading Activity 1 from "Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue"	Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Why is it important to come to terms when engaging in dialogue? Activity 2 from "Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue"	Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Was it uncomfortable to listen to feedback from your peers about your argument? Activity 3 from "Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue"	Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: What was easy about agreeing or disagreeing with your conversation partner's argument? What was difficult? Activity: "All Minus One: Play the Devil's Advocate"

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled “Meeting the Enemy: Listening to Understand,” outlines the activity for the first day of the mini-unit. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the “time” table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s).

Meeting the Enemy: Listening to Understand

Have students watch the TEDx Talk, [“MEETING THE ENEMY: A feminist comes to terms with the Men’s Rights movement”](#) by Cassie Jaye. After watching the video, ask the following questions: How did Cassie Jaye learn about the views of her “enemy”? What was her barrier to understanding the perspectives of the men she interviewed? How did she overcome this barrier and come to understand their perspective?

Tell students: In this unit, you will practice listening to understand the perspective of someone else. To show you understand another’s perspective, you will state their perspective in a way that you would agree with.

Analytic Dialogue

Teach students the stages of analytic reading found on page 2 of “Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers” (Appendix J), specifically stages two and three. Describe how these stages of reading apply to dialogue. For example, explain to students that when reading a book, it’s important to understand the terms that the author uses and how they define those terms. The same applies to dialogue; it’s important to understand the words a conversation partner uses and how they define those words to grasp the argument that the partner is making.

Next, have students complete the activities in “Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue” (Appendix L).

Play the Devil’s Advocate

After students have completed the activities in “Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue,” have them “Play the Devil’s Advocate.” By playing the devil’s advocate, students will have a better grasp of John Stuart Mill’s second argument for free speech: “He who knows only his side of the case, knows very little of that.”

Start by generating a list of popular opinions and teaching students the layers of argumentation found on page 2 of *All Minus One: Play the Devil's Advocate* (Appendix Q). Then, implement the activity found starting on page 1 of this guide after students have completed the in-class activity.

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Five concludes the “HxA High School Classroom Activity Series.” See the “Culminating Activity” in the next section for an assignment to conclude the series and assess what students learned from this series.

For other activity ideas that will build on the knowledge and skills acquired through this series, see the “How to Create a Political Classroom” guide, specifically “Tips for Teachers to Create and Assess a Political Classroom” (Appendix D).

Culminating Activity: This I Believe

To conclude the “HxA High School Classroom Activity Series,” have students complete the assignment described below. The assignment is adapted from the “activity extension” found on page 2 of “*All Minus One: Play the Devil’s Advocate*” (Appendix Q).

This I Believe

Listen to the inaugural episode of the podcast series, [“This I Believe.”](#) The original program sought “to point to the common meeting grounds of beliefs, which is the essence of brotherhood and the floor of our civilization.” Write an essay (500 to 800 words), titled “This I Believe,” about one belief you hold.

Essay Instructions

Regarding your own social or political views, what is one belief you have that you think is misunderstood by many others today?

Succinctly express this belief in one to two sentences. Then describe:

- How this belief was formed. For example, what experiences in your life led you to this belief?
- How this belief has changed. For example, did you have a new experience or learn about evidence or someone else’s perspective that changed your belief?
- How this belief has been confirmed. For example, did you experience or learn about evidence that made you more confident in your belief?
- How this belief has been tested. For example, has anyone challenged your belief?

As an extension to the last bullet point — how this belief has been tested — write about a belief in opposition to your own. Steel man this opposing view. Articulate what a person who holds this view sincerely believes. Try to describe their belief more clearly than they can, and follow [“The HxA Way”](#) when doing so:

1. Make your case with evidence.
2. Be intellectually charitable.
3. Be intellectually humble.
4. Be constructive.
5. Be yourself.

End your essay by describing where your belief and the opposing view might overlap and diverge. Without making a statement about whether you think they are right or wrong, describe what you think accounts for the overlap and divergence?

Activity Extension

Once students have completed their essays, if you want to take the assignment a step further, have them read their essay aloud and record it as a podcast episode. Compile all the podcast episodes into one classroom podcast series and have the students listen to each other's episodes. This will allow students to learn about the diverse views of their peers.

NPR has a [list of apps](#) that teachers have used to create student podcasts. Follow your school's protocol for receiving parental permission if you make the podcast publicly available.

Recommended Organizations and Books for Additional Support

A variety of peer organizations share HxA's values and provide professional development, curriculum, and other resources to educators who are interested in promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in K-12 schools. HxA offers tools, resources, and programming to higher education professionals; our peer organizations offer professional development and resources to educators working in the early grades through higher education. A wide range of books also share research and perspectives on these values. This section provides an overview of organizations and resources to explore. The list is by no means exhaustive but will steer school leaders and educators in the right direction.

Organizations to Know About

[Cato's Sphere Education Initiative](#)

An organization that works with grades 5–12 educators and administrators to provide them with the knowledge, experience, resources, and professional development opportunities to bring difficult conversations on the most pressing issues to the classroom and equip our country's students to engage in civil dialogue. By bringing facts and reason to the conversation, and through emphasizing viewpoint diversity, Sphere works to rekindle the foundation of civic culture in America.

[Civic Spirit](#)

An organization committed to educating, inspiring, and empowering schools across faith traditions to enhance civic belonging and responsibility in their student, faculty, and parent communities.

[Educating for American Democracy](#)

A collaborative effort providing an inquiry-based content framework for excellence in history and civics for all learners that is organized by major themes and questions, supported by key concepts.

[Let Grow](#)

An organization that believes today's kids are smarter and stronger than our culture gives them credit for. And treating them as physically and emotionally fragile is bad for their future — and ours. Let Grow is making it easy, normal and legal to give kids the independence they need to grow into capable, confident, and happy adults.

[OpenMind](#)

An interactive, psychology-based platform designed to foster intellectual humility, empathy, and mutual understanding across a variety of differences. OpenMind equips people with skills and a shared language to

overcome their differences and work together to solve their collective problems. They provide a set of tools that schools, organizations, and corporations can use to depolarize their communities.

Books to Get You Started

***All Minus One* by Richard Reeves, Jonathan Haidt, and Dave Cicirelli⁷**

This book is an edited version of John Stuart Mill's famous essay, "On Liberty." It articulates, in Mill's words, three central arguments for the merits of free speech and viewpoint diversity.

***The Case for Contention: Teaching Controversial Issues in American Schools* by Jonathan Zimmerman and Emily Robertson⁸**

This book provides a historical analysis of how controversial issues have surfaced in K-12 public schools, makes the case for why controversial issues should be taught, and provides recommendations for including controversial issues in school curriculum.

***The Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt⁹**

This book shows how the problems in schools today have their origins in three ideas that have become increasingly woven into American childhood and education: "What doesn't kill you makes you weaker; always trust your feelings; and life is a battle between good people and evil people."

***Deep in Thought: A Practical Guide to Teaching for Intellectual Virtues* by Jason Baehr¹⁰**

This book is a philosophical and practical guide to one of the most important aims of education: helping students become skilled thinkers and learners.

***Don't Label Me: How to Do Diversity Without Inflaming the Culture Wars* by Irshad Manji¹¹**

This book shows how to achieve the goal of diversity without inflaming the culture wars and is a valuable tool in learning to create cultures in which viewpoint diversity is part of diversity itself.

7. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). Retrieved from <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

8. Zimmerman, J., & Robertson, E. (2017). *The case for contention: Teaching controversial issues in American schools*. University of Chicago Press.

9. Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2019). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. Penguin.

10. Baehr, J. (2021). *Deep in thought: A practical guide to teaching for intellectual virtues*. Harvard Education Press.

11. Manji, I. (2020). *Don't label me: How to do diversity without inflaming the culture wars*. St. Martin's Griffin.

***Intellectual Character: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Get It* by Ron Ritchhart ¹²**

This book presents a view of intelligence that moves beyond ability to focus on cognitive dispositions such as curiosity, skepticism, and open-mindedness.

12. Ritchhart, R. (2002). *Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters, and how to get it*. John Wiley & Sons.

Appendix: Tips for Teachers and Classroom Activities

APPENDIX A

Common Core State Standards

The series addresses Common Core State Standards for English language arts (ELA), including reading informational texts, speaking and listening, literacy in history/social studies, and writing. The standards for the entire series are listed in this table. Although only ELA standards are outlined, many of the activities of the mini-units meet standard requirements in other disciplines.

	Grades 9–10	Grades 11–12
English Language Arts >> Reading: Informational Texts		
Key Ideas and Details	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3
Craft and Structure	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.5	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6
English Language Arts >> Speaking & Listening		
Comprehension and Collaboration	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4
English Language Arts >> Literacy in History/Social Studies		
Key Ideas and Details	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
Craft and Structure	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
English Language Arts >> Writing		
Text Types and Purposes	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

APPENDIX B

Discussion Guide: *The Case for Contention: Teaching Controversial Issues in American Schools*

Created by Samantha Hedges

Heterodox Academy invites current K-12 school administrators and teachers and those training to become administrators and teachers to adopt or adapt these discussion questions as warranted by their interests and circumstances. Our one request: within an environment of open-mindedness, curiosity, and intellectual humility, please encourage disagreement and ensure everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

Zimmerman, J., & Robertson, E. (2017). *The case for contention: teaching controversial issues in American schools*. University of Chicago Press.

Discussion Questions

Should Controversial Issues be Taught?

1. Zimmerman and Robertson provide a historical reflection of how and why controversy was kept out of the classroom. Horace Mann, for example, argued that schools should teach “common political principles that are ‘accepted by all’” (p. 11). Richard Rorty claimed that public school teachers in a democratic society should not teach controversial issues: “It is impossible for the public schools of a democratic country to educate youth in areas in which education would call into question beliefs that are central to the general tenor of public opinion” (p. 57). Why might calling into question central beliefs be impossible in a democratic society, and why should schools teach political principles accepted by all? Do you agree or disagree with these statements?
2. Zimmerman and Robertson assert that controversial issues should be taught in public schools for two reasons: (1) “Sometimes it is impossible to teach a subject properly without taking a stand on controversial issues” (such as causes of the Mexican-American War and evolution). (2) “Civic education as preparation for life in a democratic society should develop the ability to discuss hot-button issues with other citizens who hold positions that compete with one’s own” (p. 60). Do you agree with these reasons? Are there other valid or important reasons controversial topics should be taught if you agree that they should be taught at all?
3. Zimmerman and Robertson pose the question: if teachers should not teach about controversial issues, “what would a ‘just the facts’ curriculum look like” (p. 63)? And later in the book, they make the following

statement supporting teaching controversial issues: “Public school teachers are entrusted with passing on to the next generation the society’s accumulated store of knowledge” (p. 89). Do you think the passing on of “society’s accumulated store of knowledge” requires the teaching of controversial issues? Or would a “just the facts curriculum” be sufficient to prepare young people for participation in a democratic society?

Which Controversial Issues Should Be Taught?

4. Zimmerman and Robertson describe three possibilities for when issues might be regarded as controversial: maximally controversial issues, expert-public disagreements, and disagreements solely among experts (found on pp. 49-50). What are the key characteristics of each type of controversy? Should each type of controversy be taught? If so, how should these controversies be taught? Do your responses to these questions align with or differ from how the authors address these questions, and if so, how?
5. The third possibility for when an issue might be regarded as controversial — maximally controversial issues — often involves moral questions (e.g., Should gay marriage be legal? Is racism primarily structural or individual?) and questions that have no clear right answer. Why discuss maximally controversial issues when they are moral questions with no clear right answer? If discussed, what should be the goal of such a discussion? The deliberation of maximally controversial issues may produce the belief among students that everything is a matter of opinion. How do the authors propose addressing this problem (see p. 72)? Do you agree or disagree with their proposal?

What is the Role of the Teacher?

6. Zimmerman and Robertson described that in the 1930s, most of the public did not want nor trust teachers to handle controversial topics (p. 22). What was the concern of the public at this time? Has the sentiment changed over time? Do you agree or disagree with the sentiment?
7. Zimmerman and Robertson described scenarios in which citizens opposed teaching a balanced approach to controversial issues. In the wake of World War I, the Daughters of the American Revolution declared, “We want no teachers who say there are two sides to every question” (p. 18). This sentiment was reiterated during the Cold War with the question of communism: “We want NOTHING ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE of any of those questions” (p. 25). Are there examples that you can point to today that resemble these arguments that there are no “two sides to every question” regarding questions being

debated in the public square? If so, how does this mentality toward issues with which the public holds opposing views affect how the issues are taught in schools?

8. Later in the book, Zimmerman and Robertson described a teachers' association's objection to a one-sided curriculum that took an anti-nuclear stance. "Since the time of Socrates, it has been the charge and privilege of teachers [to] encourage their students to examine all sides of controversial issues." "To do otherwise is to rob students of that freedom of choice which is central to our concept [of] a democratic society ... It presumes that the teacher has an inside track on Truth" (p. 41). Compare this sentiment to the sentiments in the previous question: How do the advocates described in question seven and in this question view the role of the teacher in the discussion of controversial issues? How do the views compare to your view of the role of teachers?
9. Zimmerman and Robertson tell a story of an instructor at a university asking his students to write the word "Jesus" on a piece of paper, then put the paper on the floor and step on it. "The objective of the lesson was to teach students about the power of cultural figures." Zimmerman and Robertson ask, did the teacher cross "an ethical line between education and mandated self-discovery" (p. 44)? In a similar vein, Zimmerman and Robertson quote philosopher Alexander Meiklejohn to state that teachers should be allowed to share their opinion but caution against using the classroom to indoctrinate students: "Our teachers must be advocates, but they may never be salesmen or propagandists" (p. 95). Is it possible for teachers to share their opinions with their students without the risk of indoctrinating them? If so, how should teachers present their opinions while establishing an ethical line they will not cross?
10. Zimmerman and Robertson note that statements by professional associations, school district policies, and legal opinions in court cases have all sought to define academic freedom in public schools. One issue of concern is how to balance teachers as private citizens and teachers as public employees. Because the primary responsibility of teachers is "the education of the young" (p. 88), should public school teachers be viewed as different from other public employees? How should academic freedom be defined for public school teachers?

How to Teach Controversial Issues

11. Zimmerman and Robertson present deliberation as one method for teaching controversial issues. They claim, "If deliberation is a central aspect of civic participation and schools are places with the necessary background conditions for practicing it [i.e., an environment in which young people with

diverse perspectives work together and alongside each other], then discussing controversial issues in schools can be seen as a way of preparing future citizens to deliberate” (pp. 61-62). What are the pros of teaching deliberation as a means of civic engagement? The authors provide three examples for why teaching deliberation of controversial ideas might be rejected: What are they? Do you agree or disagree?

12. Zimmerman and Robertson present three approaches that teachers can take toward controversial issues in the classroom: avoidance, directive teaching, and neutrality (starting on p. 67). What does each approach look like in practice? Under what circumstances should each approach be taken up? For example, what is the appropriate approach for maximally controversial issues versus expert-public disagreements?
13. Zimmerman and Robertson provide an example of “avoidance” when describing the response of schools to the killing of Michael Brown by the police: When a controversial issue arises, like the killing of Michael Brown, teachers are told to “change the subject” or only discuss the issue if raised by a student, and “if students became ‘emotional about the situation,’ refer them to a counselor or social workers” (p. 93). What are the consequences of treating students as if they are too fragile to engage in difficult conversations? Conversations about the incident were at the local community college, but, as one student noted, many students “don’t have a chance to talk about race and policing with others who may not share their views” (p. 93). What is the role of the school versus other institutions in the community with a discussion about controversial issues?

How to Balance the Interests of Parents and Students

14. Zimmerman and Robertson note that when controversial issues were ignored, students viewed their teachers as foremen, wardens, and robotic apologists for the regime: “Students do not want as teachers ‘plastic people’ — colorless, less-than-real figures, who are unwilling to express their own opinions” (p. 34). But later, the authors describe that as the teaching force was showing signs of liberal, or sometimes radical, sensibilities, more controversial issues were making their way into classrooms, and “some students, as well as parents, charged newly radicalized instructors with imposing their dogmas in school.” How should schools strike a balance between the wishes of parents and students and the role of teachers?
15. Zimmerman and Robertson pose three questions to interrogate the conflict between teaching controversial issues and the religious, political, or cultural commitments of parents: “Does the parents’

interest in developing a shared life with their children generate a right to ‘ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions?’ “Does meeting the children’s interest in leading a good life require the development of capacities for critically assessing the way of life of their parents and choosing an available alternative if they find it is not good for them?” “Does democratic civic education itself require the development of critical capacities that enable autonomous judgment?” (pp. 77-78). What is your response to these questions?

How to Incorporate Controversial Issues in Public Schools

16. Zimmerman and Robertson quote philosopher Alexander Meiklejohn to claim that teachers cannot teach reasoned deliberation if they are forbidden or afraid to discuss controversial issues: “How can [teachers] expect to teach students to think fearlessly if they are beset by fears?” (p. 23). Plus, teachers have felt ill-prepared to teach about controversial topics and have lacked time to do so. If teachers are not prepared to lead discussion-based activities, and if there is limited time in the school day to do so, should controversial issues be taught? If so, how should the system, whether teacher training or curriculum, change or adapt to allow for these discussions?
17. Zimmerman and Robertson propose six policy prescriptions: (1) Distinguishing types of controversial issues; (2) Parental rights; (3) Student rights to discuss controversial issues; (4) Determining who decides whether a particular controversial issue should be taught; (5) Due process rights for teachers; (6) Scope for learning how to teach controversial issues (pp. 90-91). Do you agree or disagree with these policy prescriptions? Would you add or omit any?
18. Zimmerman and Robertson close the book by asserting: “Part of the problem lies in the preparation of teachers, who are rarely instructed in how to address controversial questions.” “But the bigger obstacle involves the overall status of our teaching force, which has never received the same respect or credibility as other white-collar professions” (p. 99). Do you agree or disagree with the “bigger obstacle” that the authors present? Do you think there are other issues or barriers to teaching controversial issues in public schools that ought to be addressed?

This book discussion guide was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

How to Create a Political Classroom: A Practical Guide for Teachers

Created by Samantha Hedges

This instructional guide for teachers provides practical guidance on how to structure a political classroom. This guide was developed from a *heterodox: the blog* article¹³ and research outlined in two books that resulted from one longitudinal study: *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*¹⁴ by Diana Hess and *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*¹⁵ by Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy. In each book, the major findings are showcased through case studies. This guide draws from six case studies — three from each book — to outline key features of a political classroom.

A central argument of *The Political Classroom* is that schools are and ought to be political sites. The authors use the term “political” as it applies to the role of citizens within a democratic society. They assert that citizens are political when they are democratically making decisions about questions that ask how should we live together? And by extension, the authors argue, “The political classroom is one that helps students develop their ability to deliberate political questions.”

The theoretical grounding of the longitudinal study was deliberative democracy. In this theory, a government or policy is considered legitimate if the decision-making process is open to public deliberation. Deliberative theorists argue that when the public can openly discuss policy, knowledge is expanded and self-interest is diminished. And they argue that the resulting policy from open discussion is one that a community or governing body can legitimately expect members to follow.

This guide is split into two parts. This portion, Appendix C, guides the aims, purposes, and characteristics of a political classroom. Appendix D outlines how teachers can create political classrooms.

Aims of a Political Classroom

The authors articulate six aims of the political classroom: political equality, tolerance, autonomy, fairness, political engagement, and political literacy.

Political equality. Political equality maintains that all citizens should be allowed to contribute to decision-making. Deliberating as equals is one way for students to develop an appreciation for this principle.

13. Hedges, S. (2020). Creating a Political Classroom to Reduce Political Polarization. *Heterodox: the blog*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/creating-a-political-classroom-to-reduce-political-polarization/>

14. Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. Routledge.

15. Hess, D. E., & McAvoy, P. (2014). *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*. Routledge.

Tolerance. Political tolerance is the recognition that citizens should not unjustly outlaw or persecute individuals or groups for having reasonable views that others find objectionable. When students consider policy questions, they must consider their personal preferences and whether their views are in line with the principle of tolerance.

Autonomy. Autonomy refers to citizens being allowed to direct their own lives — i.e., the values of liberty and freedom. Teaching toward autonomy helps young people develop the skills and knowledge to make well-reasoned decisions and engage in deliberation. In deliberation, they will encounter views different from their own, reflect and respond when their views are interrogated by others, consider relevant evidence, and practice argumentation.

Fairness. Fairness asks citizens to enter policy conversations to find the best solution, considering their personal preferences and the views and rights of others. This requires students to articulate reasons they hold particular views, listen, and reconsider their preferences, given other people's concerns.

Political engagement. Political engagement means that citizens are informed and concerned about particular issues and political outcomes. The political classroom aims to increase interest in political issues and democratic activities through deliberating the controversies that students will confront outside of school.

Political literacy. Political literacy requires citizens to weigh the evidence and understand how issues align with fundamental disagreements about the ideal democratic system. When students understand competing ideologies underlying controversial issues and competing views about democracy, they can place the arguments they hear and their own views into the larger political picture.

Characteristics of Political Classrooms

The political classrooms in the longitudinal study were social studies classes for either middle school students or high school students — only one case study was from a middle school class, the other five were from high school classes. All but one political classroom was a required course, and none of the political classrooms were tracked — i.e., they were open to all students in the school. Non-tracked political classrooms provide equal access to a high-quality curriculum, which leads students to see one another as political equals. They teach the skills of “civil discourse” and foster political engagement that normalizes political difference and conflict.

The case study classes either focused on policy issues, the Constitution, the judicial branch of government, or the legislative branch of government. The controversial topics covered in class were modern-day or current issues, and the political classrooms used primary source texts, not textbooks.

Purposes of Political Classrooms

The teachers featured in each of the six case studies had a specific purpose for constructing their political classroom. Each purpose was embedded within the goal of creating a political classroom that was as authentic as possible to the real-world political environment.

1. To help students understand multiple perspectives and communicate effectively with people with opinions contrary to their own.
2. To develop critical thinking in students through critical analysis of the Constitution and by developing an understanding that embedded in Supreme Court rulings are controversies concerning the interpretation of the Constitution.
3. To improve students' abilities to effectively discuss controversial issues within a free marketplace of ideas to practice fundamental aspects of citizenship, including mutual respect, free speech, and participation.
4. To teach toward inclusive participation, which requires citizens to see each other as political equals and to engage in the process to arrive at a solution that promotes the common good.
5. To teach students to reflect critically on the political values they hold while maintaining their personal beliefs.
6. To structure learning to promote the principles of political tolerance and fairness to help students move from holding views based on self-interest to considering how fellow citizens are affected by various policies so students will consider what costs they are passing on to others when they hold particular views and advocate particular positions.

Characteristics of Teachers Who Facilitate High-Quality Political Talk

The most important factor in determining whether students learn how to engage in high-quality political talk and discuss controversial issues effectively in the classroom is the quality of the teacher's practices. Teachers skillful at engaging students in political talk have these characteristics:

- They have a sophisticated understanding of the purpose of discussion and its link to democracy writ large.
- They can carry out their theoretical commitments and goals because they have sound ideas about what they are trying to teach.

- They can translate the purpose of discussion and theory into practice by constructing well-thought-out and thorough lesson plans about controversial issues.
- They are continuously learning and staying abreast of the social, cultural, and political questions that are up-for-debate in the public and political spheres.

The Role of Teachers in Political Classrooms

Effective teachers of political classrooms facilitate the discussion but do not dominate it, and they encourage students to speak to one another directly.

- **Facilitators begin discussions with a focus question.** For example, “what was the most compelling argument in the Supreme Court case?” The focus question should follow specific criteria: It cannot be answered without using the text; it is open-ended in that there is no right or wrong answer; and it is a question about which the teacher, as the facilitator, has some genuine curiosity.
- **Facilitators ask clarifying questions and raise new issues.** When factual disputes need to be clarified, they ask short questions to probe for factual evidence; for example, when discussing affirmative action, the teacher may ask: “are quotas legal?”
- **Facilitators help students with difficulty expressing their points by rephrasing their questions or comments.** This keeps the discussion moving forward and helps students learn how to clearly state their viewpoint.
- **Facilitators give airtime to minority views.** When facilitators show that minority views are valued, students will feel more comfortable giving their true opinions.
- **When there is a dissenter among the student, facilitators shift focus to that argument, then ask all students to pretend to support the opinion of the dissenting student.** This is an important part of developing critical thinking skills — the ability to take a different position and to argue it with credence and credibility.
- **Facilitators do not explicitly state their opinions.** By not disclosing their opinions, a safe environment is created in which students are not trying to impress their teacher by aligning with their views, and the students do not feel rejected if they have the opposite opinion of their teacher. Plus, this approach helps students take ownership of the process. Instead of sharing their opinions, facilitators, when necessary, play devil’s advocate. Facilitators should teach students what it means to be a devil’s advocate so students feel comfortable challenging the teacher when they are in this role.

This guide and the subsequent tips were originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

Tips for Teachers to Create and Assess a Political Classroom

Created by Samantha Hedges

Tips for Creating a Political Classroom

Create a Classroom that is Student-Centered

Before developing and implementing a discussion-based activity, teachers should set up the classroom environment, so it is conducive for student-centered political talk.

- **Create a “we” dynamic in the classroom.** Teachers start the semester or school year with a “social day” focused on having students talk to classmates they do not know. The teacher should also meet with students one-on-one to build a relationship of trust.
- **Arrange desks to promote student-driven dialogue.** The desks should be arranged in a circle or U-shape, or in an arrangement that is most conducive to the discussion-based activity. Teachers sit outside of the circle or off to the side of the student seating arrangement.
- **Have students develop the norms and guidelines that govern discussions.** The guidelines should be publicly posted, referenced periodically, and represent the groups’ will. Heterodox Academy’s norms and values — [“The HxA Way”](#) — are a model for teachers to consider when developing the guidelines for their political classroom.
- **Center classroom time around student-led large or small group discussions.** Every student should be expected to participate, but this does not mean that every student must speak during every discussion.
- **Assign seats or groups, mixing perspectives and discussion abilities.** Most case study teachers mixed perspectives and discussion abilities when arranging large and small group discussions, but one teacher placed students in heterogeneous groups based on verbal prowess and comfort level in discussion so they would feel comfortable participating. In this arrangement, there was one group comprised of students who were quiet in class, another group with students who did participate but without a lot of confidence or frequency, and a third group with students who were quite vocal. The quiet students talked, and vocal students had to learn to yield the floor. Groups do not need to be permanent — they can change throughout the semester or school year.

Develop a Discussion-Based Activity

Here are some options for student-centered discussion-based activities. These activities are drawn from the six case studies described in the two books.

- **Town Hall Meeting.** A Town Hall Meeting is a public forum where participants air their views on important controversial issues to either affect public policy, educate others, or persuade others to come around to their viewpoint.
- **Seminar.** Seminars are text-based, large group discussions designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of the issues, ideas, and values embedded in a text. Doing the work of a seminar is trying on new ideas and includes referring to the text, listening and responding to ideas presented, and making the agenda of the seminar your own.
- **Public Issues Discussion.** Public Issues Discussions cover three specific types of questions: factual, definitional, and value oriented. The policy questions presented are significant, contemporary, and unresolved political, social, and moral issues in society.
- **Moot Court Case.** A Moot Court Case has students embody the various actors involved in a Supreme Court case, such as the justices and the journalists that cover the cases. To prepare for the court case, the teacher provides the readings, which present competing points of view, including newspaper articles, internet resources, and the Supreme Court case. Students are assigned to their role.
- **Legislative Simulation.** A Legislative Simulation requires students of a class to participate in every aspect of the decision-making of the legislature. Students spend the semester learning about the legislative branch of government and towards the end of the semester, students come together for a “full session.” While in full session, students pretend to be legislators, but they express their own political views. They debate and vote on bills they have spent the semester authoring, deliberating, and shepherding through legislative committees.

Note: The legislative simulation blurs the line between public and private life and focuses on an aggregate (partisan) view of democratic decision-making rather than a deliberative view, which is absent of political affiliation. However, the researchers noted that students learned lessons about deliberative democracy, including reason-giving, evaluation of arguments, and solutions for the common good.

Focus on a Controversial Issue

No matter the discussion-based activity, teachers should center the discussion around a controversial issue to be as authentic to the real-world political environment as possible.

- **The issue up for discussion should be a current matter of public debate.** The issue can be of national or local concern. The more local the issue, the more relatable the issue will be to the lives of the students.
- **Students can either choose the issues of focus for the semester/year or teachers can choose the issues of focus.** In either scenario, if students have time to prepare for a discussion and their voices are heard during the discussion, they can fully engage in discussion about a variety of topics, whether they choose them or the teacher chooses them. The pro of students choosing the topics: They learn how to deliberate with their classmates, and they have more buy-in to the discussion. The pro of the teacher choosing the topics: Students may not agree on which issues are important to discuss, and many students change their minds about whether they are interested in the issue as a consequence of the discussion, often because they knew little about the issue beforehand.

Prepare Students for Discussion

Teachers of effective political classrooms generally spend one to two weeks preparing students for whichever discussion-based activity they plan to implement.

- **Model political talk.** Show students effective and ineffective discussion using authentic, real-world examples, such as a town hall meeting, legislative session, and so forth. When showing ineffective discussion, teachers should point out when adults are monopolizing the conversation, not using evidence to support their opinions, and talking over one another. Teachers should point out the opposite when providing examples of effective discussion.
- **Allow students opportunities to practice civil discourse.** Teachers should scaffold the curriculum so students develop the skills necessary to talk with one another about controversial issues. Teachers should start the semester or school year actively participating in deliberations and modeling civil discourse. As the semester goes on, students gradually take charge of discussions until the teacher becomes a facilitator, observer, and/or political coach — one that answers procedural questions. Students can practice civil discourse in-person and online. Utilizing an online discussion board allows students an opportunity to practice and feel more confident using civil language to prepare for in-person discussion.
- **Provide background material on the issue of focus well before the activity.** For example, provide written, audio, and visual materials; provide students background information on a particular policy position, if a role has been assigned; and provide Supreme Court case documents and the opinions of the justices. Students can study the background material individually or in small groups.

- **Teach students the procedures of the activity.** For example, if students are expected to recreate a legislative session, students must understand and practice the procedures of the legislature, such as how to create a policy resolution, how committee meetings are run, and how to address Members of Congress. Depending on the activity, they must also understand governing documents, such as the Bill of Rights; the responsibilities of political figures, such as the Supreme Court justices; and the ideological commitments of political figures, such as the differences between political parties.
- **Give students time to prepare for their roles.** Students can prepare for their roles by working individually or in pairs, reading articles, watching videos, hearing speakers, searching the Internet for information, and calling relevant organizations.
- **Teach students about the rubrics or assessments that determine their grade.** Practice the elements of the rubric or assessment so students understand how they can earn and lose points.

Require Students Take on a Perspective

Discussion-based activities of a political classroom should require students to embody a perspective or take on a particular role in the discussion.

- **Each student assumes the role of a person with a particular perspective.** All students should choose or be assigned to a role. Depending on the activity, students may advance their own perspective, pick a role that represents a perspective or position they do not currently hold, or be assigned to a perspective or position by the teacher. If the activity requires students to represent a perspective or position they do not hold, the teacher may equally distribute the roles for each of the various points of view on the issue. In like-minded schools — for example, one with a student body that leans politically left — assigning positions or perspectives or requiring students take on a position or perspective opposite of their own helps to insert viewpoint diversity into the discussion.
- **Students engage in discussion by embodying their role.** Teachers encourage students to appeal to logos, ethos, and pathos (reason, ideals, and emotion) when constructing their arguments to defend their position.

Engage the Community in Discussion-Based Activities

The political classroom should be as authentic to the real-world as possible. One way to achieve this goal is to include parents and the community in the discussion.

- **Invite parents and community members to either observe or participate in a discussion.** Involving parents and community members in the process will generate support among adults to include controversial issues in schools. One case study teacher invited parents and community members to observe the end-of-semester mock legislative session, and one teacher invited parents and adults to participate in the same discussion the students had during the day in the evening. The researchers noted that the latter approach does not work in all schools but is worth exploring because discussing issues across generational divides further expand the diversity of perspectives and provides an opportunity for different political generations to hear one another's views.
- **Invite speakers from the community to add a human element to controversial issues.** Guest speakers expose students to different views. The goal is not to change their mind but to give students an authentic political experience of engaging in discussion with someone who advocates a different view and to practice listening and responding so it promotes goodwill and respect.

Tips for How to Assess the Activities of a Political Classroom

Teachers of effective political classrooms utilize authentic assessments. The assessments are classroom-based, tightly aligned to the curriculum and instruction, and assess students' progress toward goals valued in the world beyond school. A formal assessment of student participation in discussion is a way to communicate to students that discussion is valued, and they provide students with the specific feedback they need to improve their discussion skills.

Note: One case study teacher did not formally assess student participation in discussions because he was adamantly opposed to the grading of seminar participation — “paying kids to talk” is inauthentic. The teacher thought that incentivizing discussion did not represent the way public discourse operates outside of school. The researchers noted that difference in discussion techniques is expected in political classrooms (e.g., students can ask questions, use statistical data, tell personal stories, etc.) and that discussion rubrics specific enough to be helpful to students rarely allow for these types of difference because they explicitly identify common ways that people should behave in a discussion. One student of the study noted that “free speech should mean that we have the freedom not to speak.”

Examples of Assessments by Case Study

- Elaborate worksheet to prepare for and score each discussion. The teacher also administered a traditional written test at the end of each unit, and the students had to independently give advocacy speeches on a controversial public issue, orally defending a position.

- Rubric to assess preparation and participation. The rubric included knowledge of subject, portrayal of role, and effectiveness as a participant. The teacher also held a debrief about the discussion the following day to talk about what went well and what did not.
- Data retrieval chart, called a “ticket” assignment, that identified the basic arguments made by each Supreme Court Justice. The assessment was to be completed before the discussion, and it required students to read and interact with Supreme Court case text. If a student failed to complete their ticket, they had to observe the discussion from outside of the circle and take notes on participation patterns, which were shared by the student during the debriefing. The discussion was not graded; it was designed to help students understand the text.
- Discussion criteria that informed discussion grades. The discussion grade was a part of the end-of-unit exam. The end-of-unit exam included basic questions, for example, about parts of the Constitution, and a written analysis of focus. Students also wrote oral arguments before a discussion as homework.

Political Classrooms in Religious Schools

The Political Classroom describes a case of a political classroom in a Christian private school. Rather than student-centered discussion, the pedagogical method of this teacher was an interactive lecture. The aim of this political classroom was “bounded autonomy,” and the teacher tried to have students reflect critically on the political values they hold while maintaining their religious beliefs. For more guidance on how to create a political classroom in a religious school, read the case of “Mr. Walters.”

Tip Sheet: How to Navigate Moral Disagreements

Adapted by Daniel Koas

As Musa al-Gharbi pointed out in his *heterodox: the blog* article titled “Three Strategies for Navigating Moral Disagreements,”¹⁶ despite assumptions to the contrary, people are not fundamentally rational. Research in cognitive science and psychology shows that when disagreements arise, appeals to rational standards, facts, or statistics can often polarize people more. When people feel threatened or cornered by the evidence, rather than conceding, they often kick debates into the moral sphere, where claims become much more difficult to falsify. In these instances, empirical evidence not only loses most of its force, but even arguments appealing to rivals’ own perceived interests can backfire.

The strategies below summarize al-Gharbi’s strategies for how to approach moral disagreements in constructive ways. HxA members and other heterodox enthusiasts who wish to help their students engage in open inquiry and constructive disagreement can use these strategies to build mutual understanding to have better conversations on difficult issues.

Lower the perceived state of the disagreement or conflict

The more people see as “riding on” their being right, the less they will be willing to change. So, the first thing to do if you want to avoid having a conflict escalate into the moral sphere is to lower the (identity, reputational, normative, practical) costs of your opponent admitting that they may be wrong or that you might be right. There are a few aspects to this:

Don’t sling pejorative labels or assign bad motives

Someone need not be a bad, sexist, racist, ignorant, stupid, brainwashed, or crazy person to disagree with you. Given how complicated and uncertain many issues are, there is room for reasonable disagreement on virtually any topic. When the insinuation or allegation that the source of the dispute is some negative attribute the other person has, the conversation is unlikely to be productive.

When people sling labels, they are also setting a high reputational cost for agreement. When the disagreement is not about the facts, it’s about the other person, how they see themselves, and how they are seen by others. To elevate the conversation, criticize positions rather than people.

16. al-Gharbi, M. (2018, February 16). Three strategies for navigating moral disagreements. *heterodox: the blog*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/blog/three-strategies-moral-disagreements/>.

Agree upon facts first

Often, we lump facts together with implications and applications; for example, “because climate change is real, we have to have strict regulations.” It is unwise to argue in this way; if the extent to which people contribute to climate change was already controversial to the person you are arguing with, and then they think accepting climate change is real also means they also have to accept massive government interventions – that’s going to be a much tougher sell.

To stick with this example: first, work towards an agreement about factual details (like the reality of climate change, the extent to which people are driving it, etc.). Then talk about what to do about it or how best to address it.

Lower a disagreement’s visibility

In public environments, including digital forums, there is much more pressure to conform to one’s group and to virtue signal. It is also far more embarrassing to admit you were wrong to the whole world than to a single person. People are generally much more reasonable in more intimate settings. Therefore, one way to lower the stakes of a debate is to decrease its visibility. This can also help reduce the possibility of mob effects (and prevent derailments by others jumping into the conversation).

Don’t demand too much from the conversation

People often go into conversations with unrealistic expectations of what can or will be achieved. There is an expectation that one side will be converted to the other’s way of thinking, or that they’ll both be swayed and meet somewhere in the middle. This creates needless pressure.

In cases of deep disagreement, the initial and primary goal should be simply to clearly understand where the other is coming from and to be well-understood oneself. It is often a major accomplishment just to walk away from a conversation knowing concretely those on the ‘other side’ of an issue are not necessarily stupid, crazy, ignorant, or evil and there can be morally and intellectually defensible disagreement on the matter.

Appeal to identity, values, narratives, and frames of reference

Speak to people in their own language

Research shows that people become much more willing to reconsider or even change their views and to accept controversial facts when presented to them in terms of their own values, commitments, and frames of

reference. If you want someone to consider your empirical claims, it's a lot easier to be convincing if you cede the "home court" advantage. Otherwise, one thing you may be arguing about, besides the facts, is the framing.

For example, if you are a progressive talking to a conservative, try to explain why, as a conservative, they might find your position compelling. Additional research is likely required: If you want to engage conservatives' frames, you must learn conservative views about the matter. What are the arguments they deploy against your position? Is there anything you can find to agree with, or things you hadn't considered that now seem pretty important? These can be great starting points for building zones of agreement.

Understand that it's worth the effort

The steps outlined here may sound demanding and intimidating — but the challenge is worth it. If you do a deep dive into a radically alternative worldview with an open mind — that mind will be blown. The exploration might, at times, be disorienting, frustrating, or triggering — but you will learn a lot. You might not abandon your own commitments, but you'll definitely come to see things in a dramatically different way. At the very least, you will discover that your rivals are not crazy, stupid, or evil — they have legitimate reasons for holding the positions they hold on many issues. That in itself — really internalizing that — can be huge.

Lead by Example: Model Civility, Flexibility, Intellectual Humility, and Good Faith

Follow the Golden Rule to engage in good faith

Both parties should be alive to the possibility they may be wrong — in part or even in full — and both parties should enter prepared to change their minds. It is unreasonable for you to expect or demand they change their mind in response to arguments if you are not sincerely prepared to do the same.

A good exercise to ask yourself sometimes is, "why do I believe this? What would cause me to change my view on this? What don't I know about this topic that might be important?" If you don't think there is anything that can cause you to change your position on a topic, this is a sign you might not be engaging in good faith.

Don't let your emotions get the best of you

Although emotions often do convey important information, they frequently mislead as well. Sometimes our initial emotional reaction is not the right one — as becomes clear with a little time and distance. Often our reactions

result from us hearing what we want to hear, or otherwise misperceiving or misinterpreting a claim. Remember this when in a difficult conversation.

In the heat of the moment, people can also use clumsy language that could (and otherwise would) be more careful or precise — but which need not derail a conversation. Asking “what do you mean by that?” or “why do you say that?” can often go a long way towards clearing up misunderstandings or defusing an initial threat response.

If people are intentionally trying to “get under someone’s skin” or put them off balance, it is especially important to be attentive to — and in control of — your emotions. Don’t take the bait! Keep focused on what matters and try to steer the conversation in a more productive direction. If this is not possible and the other person seems committed to engaging in bad faith, consider disengaging.

This tip sheet was originally published on [Heterodox Academy’s website](#).

APPENDIX F

Writing Student Learning Outcomes

Created by Deb Mashek and Laura Palucki Blake

HxA members and other heterodox enthusiasts who wish to help their students engage in open inquiry and constructive disagreement can use intentional curricular design to ensure courses, assignments, and class sessions advance critical outcomes. This tip sheet offers steps for doing so.

Curricular design — whether at the level of a single course, a major, or a common core — invites educators to think intentionally about what they want students to learn, to state those intentions in clear and measurable ways, to design their curriculum to meet those intentions, and to evaluate the success of their curriculum against those intentions.

HxA members and other heterodox enthusiasts who wish to help their students engage in open inquiry and constructive disagreement can use intentional curricular design to ensure courses, assignments, and class sessions advance critical outcomes.

The steps below provide a broad-strokes overview of how to approach course-level curricular design. Your campus colleagues in institutional research, assessment, and instructional design — and professional development centers focused on teaching and learning — can offer additional support and guidance.

Step 1. Articulate Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Before crafting a course calendar, selecting texts, or writing assignments, it is useful to first ask yourself key questions that will help you articulate the student learning outcomes your course will advance. These include: What do you want your students to do at the end of your class? What do you want students to get out of the course? Sample SLOs related to open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement include:

Students who complete this course can:

- Explain how biases, logical fallacies, heuristics, and other critical thinking limitations can impede the quality of ethical, evidence-based decision making.
- Seek, evaluate, and fairly represent the strengths and limitations of evidence for and against a social policy.
- Apply empirical research and theoretical frameworks to design strategies to promote constructive engagement across differences.
- Engage people who hold views that differ from their own with respect, curiosity, and vulnerability.

Step 2. Create Learning Experiences to Meet the Learning Objectives

After you have written SLOs, you are ready to design the course. SLOs serve as the center of your course — learning experiences should thus be designed intentionally and specifically to meet these learning objectives. Ask yourself how your texts, assignments, evaluation, and activities support your learning outcomes, and whether the class time you spend on each outcome is proportioned meaningfully.

For example, if an SLO for a course were “Seek out, evaluate, and fairly represent the strengths and limitations of evidence for and against a social policy,” the instructor could ask students to prepare for an in-class debate about a proposed drug legalization policy, with the caveat that the debaters wouldn’t learn which position they had been assigned to defend until moments before the debate kicks off. The student’s grade could be determined based on the quality of the evidence they deployed in the debate, and how accurately they represented evidence on both their side and the opposing side of the debate.

Through this step in the design process, you may realize that a different type of assignment (e.g., a reflective writing exercise) might more effectively advance your SLOs than exams. Likewise, you might realize that a different class format (e.g., small group discussion) might make more sense than traditional lecture to help students wrestle with conflicting evidence.

Step 3. Check for Alignment

These questions can help bring into relief disconnects between your intentions (i.e., the SLOs) and your course design:

1. Is each SLO addressed by at least one assignment or aspect of the course? If not, how might you modify the course to better meet the constellation of SLOs?
2. Does each assignment or aspect of the course map onto at least one SLO? If not, might you consider dropping that assignment?
3. Do the number and intensity of the different assignments signal the relative importance of the different SLOs?

Step 4. Communicate to Your Students

Discuss with your students early and often about the course SLOs and explain how they informed your decisions about course design. Help students see why you have structured your course to emphasize discussion and

perspective taking, why you're having them read authors representing a range of viewpoints, and why you're asking them to evaluate evidence on multiple sides of an issue. By making your intentions and decisions explicit, your students will have a clear sense of what you're doing and why, creating a cohesive experience that will facilitate learning. And, you will have a crisp touchstone for framing the many decisions you will need to make during course design and implementation.

Step 5. Assess Student Learning

When you introduce an assignment, state explicitly which SLO that assignment intends to advance and clarify how your evaluation criteria will focus on the students' ability to demonstrate their mastery of that SLO. A valuable way to accomplish this is to make the SLO explicit, then develop the rubric for evaluation with students. Ask them what it would look like to "engage people who hold views that differ from your own with respect." Involving students at this stage gives them a sense of agency and allows you to articulate the difference between developing respect and mastery of respect, for example.

Recommended Resources

Sample, M. (2011). *Teaching for Enduring Understanding*. <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/teaching-for-enduring-understanding/35243>.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). Backward Design. In *Understanding by Design* (pp. 13-34). ASCD.

This resource was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

APPENDIX G

Creating Connection to Enable Deep Discussion: High School Edition

Adapted by Samantha Hedges

Steven Covey's cult classic *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* advises: "seek first to understand, then to be understood." To know and to be known are core to who we are as teachers, learners, and colleagues. These processes of understanding and being understood rely on a foundation of interpersonal connection.

While interpersonal connection comes easily to some and is facilitated in some situations more than others, it can be difficult for students to cultivate interpersonal connection — or closeness — in classroom settings that can feel both anonymous and transitory. In such cases, it can be near impossible to convince students to take the interpersonal risks of sharing diverse viewpoints, admitting the limits of their own knowledge, or expressing genuine curiosity about the experiences and perspectives of others.

Fear not. Social psychology can help. To ready students for the interpersonal tasks of knowing and being known, teachers can dedicate class time to the goal of facilitating interpersonal connection among their students. The activity below, based on Arthur Aron and colleagues' experimental study, offers an effective approach.

Have students complete the activity at the start of the school year or semester (see Appendix H for activity handout). This way, students will develop close (or at least, closer) relationships before engaging in difficult or controversial topics.

Step 1. Prepare copies of the attached handout for your class.

Step 2. Assign students into pairs.

Pair students based on your knowledge of their social network, community, family background, social and political beliefs, etc. The goal is to pair students who are not close friends and who may hold divergent views. If you are unsure to what extent your students hold divergent views, provide students the opportunity to share via a questionnaire their attitudes and beliefs about social and political issues before the activity. Then, pair students together who hold divergent views on potentially controversial topics.

Step 3. Give all students the reciprocal self-disclosure activity handout.

Either have students complete the questionnaire in one sitting or break the activity into chunks, based on time constraints. For example, you can have students complete one question set per day over the span of three days — there are three question sets and each question set takes about 15–20 minutes to complete.

Set a timer, then alert students when 15–20 minutes (whichever is most appropriate for your students) is up. This will either be the close of the activity for the day or the close of one question set. If you are having students complete the activity in one day, set the timer for each question set.

Step 4. If your students completed the activity in one sitting, reconvene the students for a short discussion about their experience after they are finished.

If you spanned the activity over three days, reconvene the students at the end of the week, or after they have completed the third question set.

Suggested discussion questions include:

- What did you notice about the types of questions included? How were the question sets organized? *Key insights: progressively riskier, ask about core aspects of the self.*
- What types of things did you and/or your interaction partner say or do that made you feel connected? *Key insights: eye contact, asked follow-up questions, nodded when I shared, shared about themselves, expressed concern.*
- Did you learn something about your partners that you don't know about your best friend? A close family member? *Fun fact: Aron et al (1997) found this short, experimental task resulted in participants feeling closer to their interaction partner — a total stranger — than the typical closest relationship of 30% of similar students.*
- What do you think the picture question at the beginning and end of the handout intends to measure? *[Answer: This is the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale. It is a single item pictorial measure of closeness. Although simple, it correlates with much more complex scales of feeling and behaving close and also predicts behaviors associated with closeness, such as sharing resources and taking the other person's perspective.]*
- What aspects of this activity promote interpersonal (or person-to-person) connection? Key insights: reciprocal, escalating, self-revealing.
- Would you do this activity with someone outside of this classroom? If yes, who? Why?

Extension Activities

To create connections among all students in your class — who are not already close friends — repeat this activity multiple times throughout the semester or school year.

This activity is a good primer for more difficult conversations about controversial topics. Next, have students complete the activity, “Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With” (Appendix Q).

Sources

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 596-612.

Handout: Creating Connection in High School Classrooms: Reciprocal Self-Disclosure Activity

Adapted by Samantha Hedges

Instructions

Complete the pre-interaction question on the next page on your own.

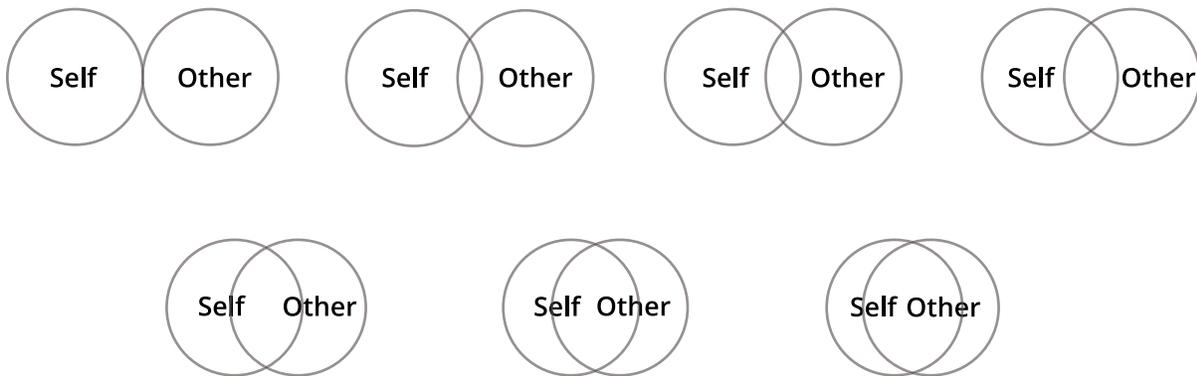
Pair up with the person with whom you have been randomly assigned to participate. Then, find a cozy spot to engage in a conversation about the questions below.

Spend 15 minutes on each question set. While working through the questions, take turns selecting and reading the questions aloud. One person should read the question aloud, then both of you answer the question.

When the teacher says time is up, return to your seat, then complete the post-interaction question on your own.

Answer this Question Before You Begin:

Which picture below best describes your relationship with your interaction partner? The more the circles overlap, the better you know each other. If the circles do not overlap, you do not know each other at all.



Question Set 1

- Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
- Would you like to be famous? In what way?
- Before making a phone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?

- What would constitute a “perfect” day for you?
- When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
- Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
- Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
- If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
- Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
- If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

Question Set 2

- If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
- Is there something that you’ve dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?
- What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
- What do you value most in a friendship?
- What is your most treasured memory?
- What is your most terrible memory?
- If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
- What does friendship mean to you?
- What roles do love and affection play in your life?
- Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share five items.
- How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people’s?

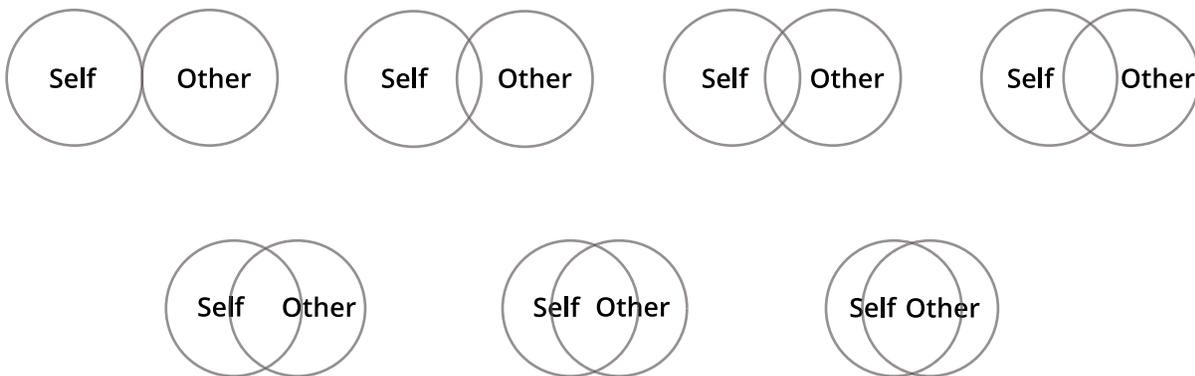
Question Set 3

- Make three true “we” statements (about you and your partner) each. For instance, “We are both in this room feeling ...”

- Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share ..."
- If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know about you.
- Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
- Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
- When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
- Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
- What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
- If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
- Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
- Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
- Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how they might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

Answer this Question After the Interaction:

Now that you've completed the activity, which picture below best describes your relationship with your interaction partner?



APPENDIX I

Book Discussion Guide & Classroom Activities: *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joshua Kieffer

About the Book and This Guide

The primary goal of *How to Read a Book: The Classical Guide to Intelligent Reading*¹⁷ is to instruct readers on how to read for information and understanding. The authors assert that learning is the process of *understanding* more (not *remembering* more); we read to understand more and to be enlightened. When reading, we engage in discovery, which is learning something by research, investigation, or reflection, without direct instruction. A teacher can supply direct answers to direct questions, but if you ask a book a question, you must answer it by your own effort.

The authors believe that unlimited educational opportunity is the most valuable service that a democratic society can provide, and that we must be not merely a society of functional literates but one of truly competent readers. This means understanding a written work's arguments, the terms on which they are made, and whether they are true in whole or part. These principles also apply when engaging in dialogue with another person or group of people — you cannot come to a mutual understanding in dialogue without these principles.

This guide, which includes Appendices J, K, and L, includes discussion questions, which focus on *How to Read a Book*, and two sets of activities — one for *How to Read a Book* and one for engaging in dialogue based on the principles of *How to Read a Book* — to practice applying these principles when reading and when dialoguing.

How to Read a Book was initially published in 1940 and updated in 1972, but the book is not dated. The principles still apply in the age of the internet and are perhaps more imperative now that children and adults receive information from an even wider variety of print and digital sources.

Objectives of Guide and Activities

The aim of this reading guide and the corresponding activities for reading is the same as the aim of *How to Read a Book* — to enhance students' ability to read for understanding. The dialogue activities further this aim by translating the principles set forth by Adler and Van Doren to discussion and deliberation.

17. Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Simon and Schuster.

The discussion guide and activities are written for high school juniors and seniors but can be modified for middle school, lower-level high school, and college students.

The learning outcomes for the book discussion, book activities, and dialogue activities are the same. To meet these objectives, every student should have their own copy of the book. Students should be able to:

1. Describe key words and terms the author/speaker uses and their definitions.
2. Identify the problems the author/speaker aims to solve.
3. Identify the key arguments the author/speaker is making.
4. Make critical judgements about the arguments of the author/speaker to agree or disagree with them.

This guide, including the “Fundamentals of Analytic Reading” and the subsequent classroom activities, was originally published on [Heterodox Academy’s website](#).

Fundamentals of Analytic Reading: A Guide for Teachers

Created by Samantha Hedges

Prerequisites

The authors of *How to Read a Book*¹⁸ describe four levels of reading: elementary, inspectional, analytic, and syntopic. The higher goal set forth by the authors is for readers to understand what they read by learning and applying the fundamentals of analytic reading. Thus, this guide focuses on analytic reading, which assumes a basic grasp of the two prior levels: elementary and inspectional. Teachers should read or skim the first four chapters (pages 3–4) to decide whether students have a basic grasp of the elementary and inspectional reading levels. If they do not, teachers can utilize the first four chapters to get ideas for how to help your students achieve readiness for analytic reading.

This discussion guide and the classroom activities found in Appendices K and L cover chapters 5–12 (pp. 45–185). Refer students to chapters 13–19 (pp. 187–298) if they want to learn how to read specific types of books, such as history, philosophy, and imaginative literature. Refer to chapter 20 if you want to teach, or your students want to learn, the highest level of reading: syntopic reading.

Be a Demanding Reader (Chapter 5)

Reading a book is a conversation between the reader and the author, and to read for understanding you must be a demanding reader. To be a demanding reader and learn something from a book, readers should be active readers, asking questions of the book.

Demanding readers ask and answer four central questions about any book:

1. What is the book about as a whole?
2. What is being said by the author(s) in detail, and how?
3. Is the book true, in whole or part?
4. What is the significance of the book?

To keep track of the answers to these questions, demanding readers mark up the book, such as by underlining important sentences, starring key arguments, and circling key terms. Marking up the book helps you stay awake,

18. Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Simon and Schuster.

express what you are thinking and what you know, and remember the thoughts of the author. Marking up the book also helps you keep track of your differences and agreements with the author. See pages 48–52 — the sections titled “How to Make a Book Your Own” and “The Three Kinds of Note-making” — to instruct your students on different markings and when to use them.

Analytic Reading (stages listed on pages 161-162)

Analytic reading is the mechanism for being a demanding reader and is the “ideal performance” of a reader. The three stages of analytic reading are outlined below. The four questions above and the three stages of analytic reading are embedded in the discussion questions and activities of this guide.

Stage 1: Comprehension - Rules for finding what the book is about (ch. 6–7)

1. Classify the book according to kind (instructional, fiction, etc.) and subject (pp. 59–74).
2. State what the whole book is about (pp. 78–83).
3. List the major parts in their order and relation to one another and outline these parts to outline the whole book (pp. 83–90).
4. Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve (pp. 92–93).

Stage 2: Interpretive - Rules for interpreting a book's contents (ch. 8–9)

1. Come to terms with the author by interpreting the key words (pp. 96–112).
2. Grasp the author's leading arguments by examining the most important sentences (pp. 119–127).
3. Know the author's arguments by finding them in sequences of sentences or constructing them out of sequences of sentences (pp. 127–133).
4. Determine which problems the author has solved, and which they have not. For the problems the author has not solved, decide which the author knew they had failed to solve (pp. 133–134).

Stage 3: Critical - Rules for criticizing a book as a communication of knowledge (ch. 10–12)

1. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your interpretation of the book (pp. 140–144). (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgement, until you can say “I understand” the book.)
2. Do not disagree contentiously — be charitable to the author and humble in your disagreement (pp. 144–149). See [“The HxA Way”](#) for recommended norms of disagreement, and general guidance on civil discourse.

3. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgement you make (pp. 150–161).

This last rule for criticism includes four special criteria. Of these four, the first three are criteria for disagreement. If the reader cannot show any of these four criteria, the reader must say they agree with the author. But, regarding the fourth criteria, if the reader determines the author's analysis or account is incomplete, they cannot say they agree or disagree; therefore, they must suspend judgement.

1. Show wherein the author is unformed.
2. Show wherein the author is misinformed.
3. Show wherein the author is illogical.
4. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions apply the three stages of analytic reading. For each discussion question, sub-questions may be listed to help answer the primary question, which is directly related to the stages of analytic reading. The primary questions may be applied to any book; the sub-questions are specific to *How to Read a Book*.

Suggested Format for Discussion

Before discussing the book, set up your classroom to model a Socratic seminar. In Socratic seminars, the desks are in a circle or U-shape. The teacher may pose questions, but they are not the center of questioning. A successful seminar involves students asking questions of each other with the teacher only stepping in as facilitator to pose focus questions and to bring the discussion back to the book if it veers off course.

Comprehension Questions

1. What kind of book is this?
 - a. Is *How to Read a Book* a practical work or a theoretical work?
 - b. What category of science or art does *How to Read a Book* fall into?
2. In two to three sentences, what is this book about?
 - a. Other than "books" and "reading," what are the main subjects of *How to Read a Book*?
 - b. For what audience is *How to Read a Book* written?

3. What are the major parts or sections of the book?
4. What problems were the authors aiming to solve by writing this book? What questions did they aim to answer by writing this book?

Interpretive Questions

1. What are the author's most important sentences? What leading arguments do they reveal?
 - a. For example: "Not simply by following an author's arguments, but only by meeting them as well, can the reader ultimately reach significant agreement or disagreement with his author." What is the leading argument in this sentence?
2. What is the overall argument of the book? How do the most important sentences build together to support it?
3. Does the overall argument solve the problems or answer the questions the authors had in mind while writing? Did the authors know whether they found these solutions and answers or not?

Critical Questions

1. What information is the author missing?
2. Does the author rely on any incorrect information? If so, what?
3. Does the author commit any logical fallacies? (do their conclusions follow logically from their premises? Or do they assert things that are contradictory?)
4. Is the author's analysis complete? After reading the text, can you say "I understand" the text? What does it mean to say you understand?

Book Discussion Extension

Students can practice applying the principles outlined in *How to Read a Book* by completing the activities based on the book (Appendix K), then completing the activities that apply the principles of the book to dialogue (Appendix L).

APPENDIX K (continuation of Appendices I and J)

Classroom Activities: *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joshua Kieffer

After students have read and discussed chapters 5–12 of *How to Read a Book*¹⁹ (see Appendices I and J), have them complete these activities. The activities are specific to *How to Read a Book* but can be adapted to accompany any text, whether a book, essay, or news article.

Activity 1: Coming to Terms with an Author

The authors describe a term as a “skilled use of words for the sake of communicating knowledge” (p. 98). To understand a book or any piece of writing, the reader and the author must understand the important words used in the piece of writing — they must come to terms. Instruct students to follow the steps below to come to terms with the author. If students require help coming up with terms (the important words used by the author), you can provide them with examples such as “analytic,” “knowledge,” “inspectional,” etc. The sections of chapter 8 titled “finding the key words” (p. 100) and “finding the meanings” (p. 106) will also help them find terms and determine their meaning.

1. **Read chapter 8, “Coming to Terms with an Author.”**
2. **Identify the key terms.** Draw three columns on a piece of paper. In the first column, list the important terms the author uses.
3. **Write out the definitions of the key terms.** In the second column, write the definition of each term or what you think the terms mean.
4. **Come to terms with the author.** In the third column, write the definition of each term according to the author. Think: Do your definitions match? To come to terms with an author, you must understand how they define the terms; go back and reread how they use the terms until you understand how they define them.

19. Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Simon and Schuster.

Activity 2: Determine the Author's Message

Propositions in a book express the author's judgement about something or a declaration of knowledge. Authors put forth propositions to affirm something they think to be true or deny something they think to be false. Instruct students to follow the steps below to pick out the important sentences in chapter 9, identify the prepositions of the sentences, and construct an argument from the sentences. If students are struggling to locate the important sentences and propositions, direct them to sections "finding the key sentences" (p. 119) and "finding the propositions" (p. 123) of chapter 9.

1. **Read chapter 9, "Determining an Author's Message."**
2. **Write the important sentences and their propositions.** Write the five most important sentences in chapter 9. Write the propositions of these sentences. If you are struggling, think back to the classroom discussion about the book: The authors aimed to answer questions by writing this book, and the propositions are the answers to those questions.
3. **Construct an argument.** Put these sentences in a sequential order that constructs an argument with which you think the authors would agree.

Activity 3: Criticizing a Text Fairly

The authors' claim: to agree or disagree with a book, you must first understand the book. One way to show you understand a book is to state the position of the author in your own words. Instruct students to complete the following task to determine if they understand the points the authors are trying to make, then have them state, using facts and reason, whether they agree or disagree with the authors and why by following these steps.

1. **Read chapter 10, "Criticizing a Book Fairly."**
2. **Show you understand the chapter.** Write a one-page essay describing what the chapter is about.
3. **Agree or disagree with the author.** Then using facts and reason, write a one-page essay describing whether you agree or disagree with the authors and why.

Activity Extension

These discussion questions and activities introduce students to reading books and other written material intelligently and understanding what a book intends to teach. The analytic skills utilized to read also apply to engaging in productive dialogue. To practice applying these skills to dialogue, have students complete the activities of the companion guide: "Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue" (Appendix L).

APPENDIX L (continuation of Appendices I, J, and K)

Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joshua Kieffer

The activities below apply the rules for analytic reading described in Appendix J to dialogue. Teachers can assign these activities after reading and discussing *How to Read a Book*²⁰ or can assign them independent of the book discussion and book activities (having students read the book is highly recommended). Each activity described below requires students to pair up. Teachers can choose to keep the same pairs for all activities or have students work with a new partner for each activity.

Activity 1: Come to Terms with Your Conversation Partner

Inspired by chapter 8, on “Coming to Terms with an Author”

To constructively engage in dialogue and have a mutual understanding of what is being discussed, all people engaged in the dialogue must have a shared understanding of the definitions of the important words used — in other words, they need to come to terms. Pair up students, then give them a list of important words. For example, from *How to Read a Book*, some important words are: elementary, inspectional, analytic, enlightenment, disputatious, rhetoric, judgement, critical, theoretical (book), practical (book), propositions, and understand. When implementing this activity utilizing other texts or discussion topics, the words should be those that the students know but which are difficult to define, or which have contentious definitions, or they can be important words from other texts or topics students are studying as part of the class curriculum. In a text, important words are often in chapter and section titles, and/or they are words that the author spends a fair amount of time describing.

Instruct students to follow the steps below to come to terms with their conversation partner.

- Come to terms with your partner. Pick five words from the list and then engage in deliberation to either come to a shared understanding of the term or come to a mutual understanding of the concept as your partner understands it. Write down the definitions you and your partner settle on. Note the terms of which you and your partner could not come to a consensus definition.

20. Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Simon and Schuster.

- Discuss the process of coming to terms. Reconvene with your class and respond to these questions: How did your definitions of the terms differ from your partner? Was it difficult to come to a shared understanding? How can you use this activity in every-day conversations?

Activity 2: Develop an Argument with Your Conversation Partner

Inspired by chapter 9, "Determining an Author's Message"

Propositions express a person's judgement about something, or a declaration of their knowledge. Provide pairs of students with eight sentence strips that are either propositions you made up or propositions you copied from a text the students are reading — the propositions must connect to each other to construct an argument. Then instruct students to follow the directions below.

1. **Construct an argument.** With your partner, place the propositions the teacher provided in a sequential order to construct an argument.
2. **Persuade your classmates.** Present the argument you and your partner constructed to another pair of students or to the whole class — the teacher will make this determination.
3. **Peer-to-peer feedback.** After you and your partner present your argument, the students listening to your argument should provide civil, constructive feedback regarding whether the propositions aligned to convince them of the argument. Ask them: Did we convince you of our argument? What was convincing? What was not convincing? How can we improve our argument?

The goal of this activity is for students to persuade or convince another pair of students or the class of their argument.

Activity 3: Present an Argument to a Conversation Partner

Based on "Rules for criticizing a book as a communication of knowledge"

Have students independently construct an argument on an issue they are passionate. You can have students write their arguments as a homework assignment or in class. The argument should include facts, not beliefs or opinions, to support their claims. The goal of their argument is to persuade someone of their position on the issue. Have students pair up, then present their argument to their partner.

1. **Take on a role.** Take turns speaking (stating your argument) to your conversation partner and listening to the argument of your conversation partner.
2. **Check for understanding.** After the speaking student has finished, the listening student must restate the argument of the speaking student in their own words. The speaking student can then determine whether the listening student understood the argument. If the listening student does not understand, they can ask the speaking student clarifying questions. Based on these questions, the speaking student should then modify their argument.
3. **Agree or disagree.** Once the listening student can say “I understand” the argument, they can then state whether they agree or disagree with the argument. Reminder: Agreement or disagreement is not based on opinion (you cannot disagree because you don’t like the argument); it is based on whether the facts the speaker stated support their overall argument. After the listener states whether they agree or disagree, the listener should be charitable to the speaker and provide good reasons for their position — for example, the facts presented do not support the argument.

As a result of this assignment, students should feel more confident in their ability to present an argument, listen carefully to an argument, suspend personal opinion to focus on the facts and reasons of an argument, and provide feedback in a way that helps the speaker construct a better argument.

Activity Extension

This activity, in conjunction with the book discussion and book activities guide, provides a starting point for conversations about controversial topics — understanding terms, understanding arguments, identifying solutions, etc. To foster relationships within the classroom that set the stage for conversations about controversial topics, implement the activity “Creating Connection to Enable Deep Discussion” (Appendices G and H) prior to this activity.

Follow-up activity: To have students further practice applying the skills of analytic reading to discussion, and to introduce them to constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With” (Appendices R and S).

If you are interested in creating a classroom environment in which controversial topics are productively discussed and deliberated, follow “How to Create a Political Classroom: A Practical Guide for Teachers” (Appendices C and D).

APPENDIX M

Classroom Activities: *All Minus One*

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

Richard Reeves and Jonathan Haidt introduce their edited extract of John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty," titled *All Minus One*²¹, by posing the question: "Why is free speech important in a liberal democracy?" Mill opens his argument for free speech by asking us, his readers, to imagine a world in which just one person holds a view contrary to that held by the rest of humanity. Reeves and Haidt end the introduction to *All Minus One* by asking: "What harm could be done by silencing this lone eccentric?"

The activities in Appendices N, O, P, and Q aim to help students understand the importance of free speech for all, even those with whom we disagree, by understanding the arguments Mill articulated in *All Minus One*. By completing these activities, students will be able to:

1. Understand the three central arguments for free speech presented in *All Minus One*.
2. Show they understand the three central arguments by illustrating each.
3. Apply the teachings of Mill by presenting the opposing view of an opinion which they support.

The activities are geared towards students in the upper grades of high school (secondary school) but can be adapted for the lower grades of high school and the early years of college.

Before reading *All Minus One* and implementing these activities, we recommend checking out the guide "How to Create a Political Classroom" (Appendices C and D) for tips on how to structure a classroom conducive to discussing and practicing what Mill advocates.

Plan to spend roughly one to two weeks teaching *All Minus One* — the time depends on the reading level of students.

The classroom activities and discussion questions that accompany All Minus One were originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/).

21. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

APPENDIX N (continuation of Appendix M)

All Minus One: Coming to Terms with John Stuart Mill

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

John Stuart Mill was a philosopher and published “On Liberty” in 1859. Therefore, how he uses language and words in *All Minus One*²² may be unfamiliar to students. Based on the reading level of students, either read the essay as a class or assign the reading of the essay for homework. Then, students must come to terms with the author to truly understand the essay; students must understand the important words used by Mill and what he means by those words. See the discussion and activity guide for *How to Read a Book* (Appendices I, J, and K) for more guidance on activities that will help students come to terms while reading and engaging in dialogue.

Here is a list of important words that students will need to have a grasp of to understand the essay. While students read, they may develop their own list of terms.

Terms

Fallacy	Orthodox/heterodox
Infallible	Despotism
Preponderance	Conviction
Corrigible	Creed
Doctrine/Dogman	Contrivance
Heretics/Heresy	Partisan
Persecution	Polemic
Ad misericordiam	Vituperation
Pacification	Controversialists
Reticence	

Activity Extension

After reading *All Minus One* and discussing the terms used by Mill, pose the questions in Appendices O and P to help students understand the text.

22. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

Understanding *All Minus One* through Illustrations

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

Illustrations of John Stuart Mill's quotes are depicted throughout *All Minus One*.²³ The images illustrate the key messages of Mill, and they help the reader better understand and interpret the arguments presented in *All Minus One*. Below is a list of discussion questions and activities to encourage students to interpret the illustrations that accompany the texts and to create their own illustrations to accompany the text. Besides understanding the important words of *All Minus One*, discussion of the illustrations will help students to better grasp Mill's arguments.

Illustration Discussion Questions

1. The first illustration is of a woman with the word "shame" sewn into her finger. The thread from her finger connects to a miniature man and woman who she is holding and whose mouths have been sewn shut by the same thread.
 - a. What message does this illustration convey?
2. On pages 11–12, there is a human connected to a chain accompanied by the excerpt: "History teems with instances of truth put down by persecution. If not suppressed forever, it may be thrown back for centuries."
 - a. How does the illustration depict the excerpt? Do you agree? How would you depict the excerpt?
3. On pages 13–14, a row of masked humans lines the bottom of the pages. The excerpt that accompanies the illustration states: "Our merely social intolerance kills no one, roots out no opinions, but induces men to disguise them, or to abstain from any active effort for their diffusion."
 - a. What is the significance of the mask? Why is one human pulling away their mask? What does this signify? What is the difference between that person and the other masked humans who have on the masks and their arms by their sides?
 - b. [The following quote also describes the illustration: "Those in whose eyes this reticence on the part of heretics is no evil, should consider in the first place, that in consequence of it there is never any fair and thorough discussion of heretical opinions; and that such of them as could not stand such a discussion, though they may be prevented from spreading, do not disappear."]

23. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

4. On pages 15–16, an illustration of a human screaming inside the mind of another human is depicted to illustrate the following text: “But it is not the minds of heretics that are deteriorated most, by the ban placed on all inquiry which does not end in the orthodox conclusions. The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed [frightened into submission or compliance], by the fear of heresy.”
 - a. Dissect the illustration. Why is one human screaming inside the head of another? Based on the excerpt, what do their facial expressions tell you? What’s on the outside of the man’s head? Based on the excerpt, what do these symbols represent? Along the jawline of the man are the words “after quietly.” What is meant by this phrase?
5. In the illustration on pages 17–18, all but one human is walking away from a lit doorway. The illustration corresponds with the quote: “We can expect no fresh start... until we again assert our mental freedom.”
 - a. How would you caption this illustration, or what excerpt would you emphasize to match this illustration?
6. What is the illustration on page 22 depicting? Does the following quote align well with this illustration? “Beliefs not grounded on conviction are apt to give way before the slightest semblance of an argument.” Why? In what other way could the quote be depicted?
7. The illustration on page 24 depicts a man in the background with a woman inside of a diamond in the foreground to accompany the text: “He must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty.”
 - a. What emotions are each expressing? How do these emotions relate to the quote? What does the diamond and the vibrations from the diamond represent?
 - b. The quote is one illustration of argument number two: “He who knows only his side of the case, knows little of that.” After reading the quote in the context of the paragraph (the text is on page 23), would you have chosen a different part of the paragraph to illustrate? Why?
8. The illustration on page 26 depicts a living truth and a dead dogma. What does it mean for a truth to be living? What is a dead dogma? What message is the illustrator trying to convey?
 - a. The quote to accompany this illustration is “Instead of a vivid conception and a living belief, there remain only a few phrases retained by rote; or, if any part, the shell and husk only of the meaning is retained, the finer essence being lost.” Do the quote and illustration complement

- each other well? Are there words in the quote you think should have been part of the illustration?
9. On page 30, three people are depicted — two have their eyes closed and one has her eyes open. Two quotes accompany this illustration: “Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their post, as soon as there is no enemy in the field,” and “A contemporary author has well spoken of ‘the deep slumber of a decided opinion.’”
 - a. What are the similarities and differences in the meaning of each quote? Does the illustration encapsulate well the meaning behind both quotes? Should the illustrator have created a separate illustration for each quote?
 10. The illustration on page 34 accompanies the quote: “Every opinion which embodies somewhat of the portion of truth which the common opinion omits, ought to be considered precious, with whatever amount of error and confusion that truth may be blended.”
 - a. What is the illustration depicting? Is there another way the quote could be depicted?
 11. Look at the illustration on page 36. Did the illustrator successfully depict the quote: “Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites”? Why? Do you think the colors used to create the illustration hold some significance?
 12. The opposing illustrations on pages 37 and 38 aimed to illustrate the quote: “Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil; there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides.”
 - a. Which part of the quote is depicted? Which part or parts did the illustrator omit? What message is the illustrator trying to convey through his inclusion of some elements of the quote but the omission of others?
 13. On page 40, the illustrator depicts the “one,” the one person who holds a view contrary to the rest of humanity. The illustration is beneath the quote: “This is the real morality of public discussion: and if often violated, I am happy to think that there are many controversialists who to a great extent observe it, and a still greater number who conscientiously strive towards it.”
 - a. What is the “it” to which the author refers? Why does the illustrator depict the lone person to illustrate “it”?

14. The cover of *All Minus One* is of the lone eccentric with her eyes open and the rest of humanity with their eyes closed. In the final illustration of *All Minus One* the eyes of all of humanity are open.
 - a. What is the significance of these contrasting illustrations? How did the eyes of humanity come to be open?
15. Now that you have examined each illustration, look through them again from start to finish. You may notice that the colors used by the illustrator change from start to finish. How so? Do you think the illustrator did this on purpose? If yes, what message do you think he intended to convey?

Activity Extension

Have students illustrate the three central arguments themselves. Tell students to show they understand Mill's three arguments by creating their own illustration for each, which are described in response to the question: "What harm could be done by silencing this lone eccentric?"

First, choose one passage from each of the three sections you consider the best articulation of each argument, then illustrate those three passages. In other words, find the best passage from the section that describes the argument "the opinion may possibly be true," then illustrate that passage. Do the same for the other two arguments.

1. The opinion may possibly be true.
2. He who knows only his side of the case, knows very little of that.
3. Conflicting doctrines share the truth between them.

Teachers can assign this as an in-class activity or for homework.

All Minus One: Play the Devil's Advocate

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

John Stuart Mill argues that presenting the opposing viewpoint is necessary to establish truth. He claims that if an opposing view does not exist, it must be created. This is called playing the devil's advocate: To understand the doctrine which you profess, you must throw yourself into the mental position of those who think differently from you and considered what such persons might have to say. As Mill writes: "So essential is this discipline to a real understanding of moral and human subjects, that if opponents of all important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them, and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skillful devil's advocate can conjure up."²⁴

How to Implement the Activity

List popular opinions, then write/type them for all students to see. Choose opinions of which your students have some knowledge. You can have the students supply you with the opinions they either hold or are aware of, then, if you so choose, add any popular opinions you are aware of that have gone unidentified. Here are some examples:

- The requirement to wear face masks due to COVID-19 unjustly hinders individual liberty.
- The federal government should pass a law banning hate speech.
- The hanging or flying of the Confederate flag by private businesses should be illegal.
- A civics test, like what is required for foreign-born citizens, should be required to vote in all elections.
- College should be free for all who are accepted to a 2- or 4-year degree program.

Activity instructions

- Show and describe the pyramid below to teach students the different layers of argumentation, with name-calling being the weakest form of argument. (The pyramid is for writing but can be easily applied to dialogue.)
- Tell your students they must take a stand on each issue — either agree or disagree — but they are welcome to switch sides at any time, given new evidence.

24. Reeves, R., Haidt, J., & Cicirelli, D. (Eds.). (2021). *All minus one: John Stuart Mill's ideas on free speech illustrated* (2nd edition). <https://heterodoxacademy.org/library/all-minus-one/>.

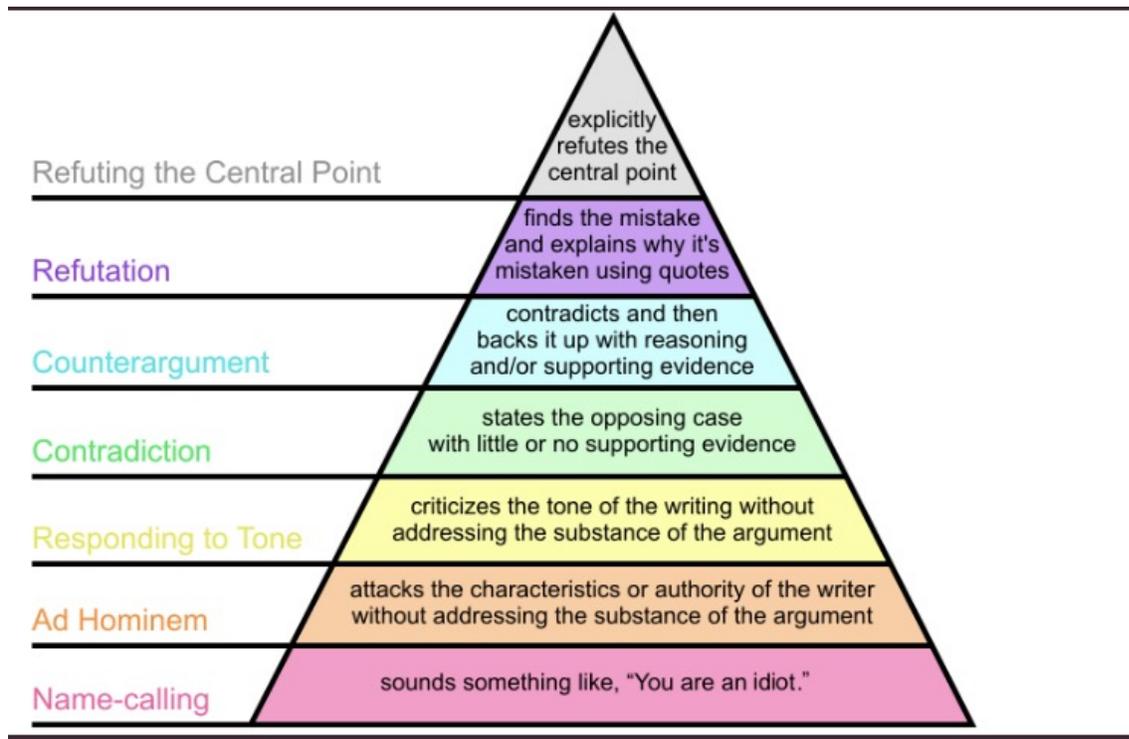
- Have students show their agreement/disagreement by walking to a designated spot in the classroom, or with an online course, by holding up a sign indicating their agreement/disagreement. If students object to taking a stand on every issue through the binary choices of agree or disagree, remind them that the activity is practice for how best to develop strong positions to support their own opinions and seek truth.
- Once the students have taken a position, ask them to articulate the opposing view (or the heretical opinion) to where their classmates who support the view can say, “You have it correct.” Instruct them to do this by presenting a “steel man” argument of the opposing view: the calmness to see and honestly state the opposing position in a manner with which you would agree. In other words, be intellectually charitable. Students can either do this as a group or individually, depending on the size and structure, such as online versus in-person, of your class.

What it means to be intellectually charitable

- Tell students to engage with the strongest form of a position with which they disagree: Try to acknowledge, when possible, how the opinion you disagree with may be right — in part or in full.
- Tell them to look for reasons the opinion may be compelling, under the assumption that others are roughly as reasonable, informed, and intelligent as you.

Spend time modeling the strongest form of argumentation before the activity, such as modeling ideal word choice and civil dialogue, and during the activity, if students resort to lower forms of argumentation. During the activity, act as the facilitator by helping students locate any blind spots — do this by playing the devil’s advocate yourself — and ensuring the dialogue is good-natured.

Figure 1: Graham's Hierarchy of Disagreement



Activity Extension

Have students practice taking the opposing view by completing the following assignment. This assignment may be completed in class or for homework.

Assignment directions

Regarding your own social or political views, what is one belief you have that you think is misunderstood by many others today? Write this view in one to two paragraphs.

Next, steel man the opposing view. In other words, articulate what the other side sincerely means (from their viewpoint) when they disagree with you. Try to describe their side more clearly than they can.

APPENDIX R

Classroom Activity: Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With

Created by Samantha Hedges

As Elizabeth Emery pointed out²⁵, “diversity of thought and appreciation of diverse perspectives can be difficult to develop in high school classrooms for a variety of reasons,” such as overprotective parents, overly cautious administrators, and students’ increasing desire to avoid topics that might “trigger” them. But students will undoubtedly encounter perspectives different from their own in college, the workforce, and society-at-large. Therefore, incorporating classroom activities that allow students to broaden their perspectives is crucial.

Activity Aim and Objectives

The aim of this activity is to promote viewpoint diversity, while simultaneously showing students they can be exposed to disagreement and difference without suffering.

By completing the activity, students will:

- Understand new perspectives
- Improve their listening and writing skills

Activity Summary

To help students broaden their perspective and practice constructive disagreement, have students:

1. Choose a sensitive topic with weighty consequences,
2. Find someone who disagrees soundly with the student’s opinion, and
3. Have a conversation with that person wherein the student mostly asks questions, listens, and takes notes.

After completing the conversation, students then write up a summary of the conversation that answers questions such as how the conversation made them feel and whether they changed their minds on the topic.

Activity Guidelines

Give students the following guidelines to work on this activity (statements in bold are for the teacher to provide

25. This guide was adapted from a HxA blog article with the same name written by Elizabeth Emery. Access the article from heterodox: the blog: <https://heterodoxacademy.org/blog/viewpoint-diversity-students-interview-someone/>.

the students; statements not in bold are guidance for the teacher, which can be shared with the students):

1. **Choose a topic you feel strongly about — one with substantial social or political implications.** They should not choose subjects like whether pineapple belongs on pizza or which Dungeons and Dragons character is the best. Have students run their topics by you before they move forward to ensure they don't choose highly personal or inconsequential topics. For more information on choosing topics, see the companion "How to Choose a Topic" handout (Appendix S).
2. **Pick a person whose views are different from your own.** Ideally, this is a person with whom students are familiar enough to have a potentially difficult conversation with, but not so familiar that the conversation can be silly and devoid of real content. Best friends are discouraged. Parents, grandparents, coaches, and teachers are welcome.
3. **Write a list of questions you would like to know about the opposing perspective — make some of the questions required.** Required questions include things like, "What evidence have you based your belief on?" "Why do you think my perspective is incorrect?," and "What personal experiences have you had that have led you to your beliefs?"
4. **Take notes during the conversation, including notes about how you felt listening to your interviewee speak, and whether you were tempted to argue.** Critically, students are not to interject their own opinion — they must either ask questions or listen. Students will use the direction of the conversation to guide unscripted questions during the conversation to further understand their interviewee's perspective.

Give your students the sheet, "How to Choose a Topic and a Person You Disagree With" (Appendix S) to guide them in how to choose their topic and interviewee.

Activity Reflection and Assessment

After the conversation is over, have students write a 500-word summary of the conversation, addressing the following questions:

1. Did this person's perspective make sense?
2. How did I feel as I listened to the opposite perspective?
3. Does their perspective seem less radical or ridiculous than it did before the conversation happened?
4. Have I changed my mind in any way?

Students can share what they wrote during whole-class or small-group discussions.

Activity Extension

Before this activity: To foster relationships within the classroom that set the stage for open inquiry and constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Creating Connection to Enable Deep Discussion,” which can be found in Appendices G and H.

Follow-up activity: To build upon students’ ability to engage in constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Seeking Disconfirmation,” which can be found in Appendices V, W, and X.

This classroom activity, including the subsequent tip sheet, was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

APPENDIX S

How to Choose a Topic and a Person You Disagree With

Created by Samantha Hedges

How to choose a topic?

Choose a topic you care deeply about and that has consequences for people other than you. The topic does not need to personally affect you, but you do need to have an opinion on the topic. Try to choose a topic being debated in the news or on social media, or a topic recently debated in the news or on social media — look at news headlines and trending hashtags if you want to research current topics.

Types of topics that are *not* well-suited for this activity:

- **Personal preferences, such as food, music, video games, movies, etc.** You are to focus on topics with societal consequences. Topics like food and music preferences are trivial and do not have wider implications for society.
- **Gossip.** Your topic should be accessible to the public — no hearsay. The topic should be currently being debated or have been debated among members of your community, government officials, journalists, etc. Rumors among friends or family are not enough.
- **Related to specific people.** Don't make it personal. Choose a topic about an idea or issue, not one related to a specific person. For example, your topic can be whether NFL players should stand during the national anthem, but not whether Colin Kaepernick should have taken the knee.

How to choose a person with whom I disagree?

Once you have identified your topic, choose a classmate or family member who disagrees with you on this topic or has a different perspective on the topic. The person does not have to 100% disagree with you — the person could agree with you on part of your argument but not all of it. For example, both you and your interviewee may agree about the need for affirmative action policies for college admissions, but you think they should be based on race and your interviewee thinks they should be based on socio-economic status (the income of your family).

Don't be shy — if you are unsure of a classmate's or family member's opinion, ask around. Start by asking, "what do you thinking about [such and such topic]?" and be open to having a conversation. Have a few topics in mind so it is easier to find someone who disagrees with you.

APPENDIX T

Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes: Discussion Questions and Classroom Activities

Created by Samantha Hedges and Ilana Redstone

Ilana Redstone, a sociologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, created six core videos (total time is less than 40 minutes) titled "[Beyond Bigots and Snowflakes](#)" that offer tools and techniques designed to encourage the tough conversations for more open dialogue. She ends the introductory video by stating there is a societal need to have open and honest conversations about sensitive topics to improve communication across ideological divides. But how to have open and honest conversations is a skill that is learned. This guide offers discussion questions and activities to accompany the videos so students can practice this skill.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this discussion and activity guide is to help students better understand their worldview, the importance of viewpoint diversity, and the costs of excessively restricting who can express which beliefs.

After completing the discussion questions and activities, students should be able to:

- Explain the importance and value of viewpoint diversity.
- Describe their worldview and understand how it relates to the opinions they form.
- Distinguish between objective facts and subjective beliefs.

These discussion questions and activities are best suited for high school juniors and seniors and college freshman and sophomores. Still, they can be adapted to fit the needs of younger high school students and older college students.

The ideal time to watch and discuss the videos and complete the activities is when students are preparing to engage in classroom discussion of controversial topics. This may be at the start of the semester or school year or it may be after they have taken time to get to know each other — see "Creating Connection to Generate Deep Discussion" (Appendices G and H) for an activity that will help students get to know each other better.

This guide is broken down by video. For each video, there is a brief description of the topic, the video, discussion questions, and activity. The descriptions that follow are included to help you, the teacher, determine when it might be best to show the video and complete the discussion questions and activities. The video "Before We Begin" has no associated questions or activities, but it is a good place to start before diving into the rest of the

series. The series ends with a “Summary,” which also does not have associated questions or activities but is a great way to end the series.

Video 1: Building Community through Viewpoint Diversity (5 minutes, 48 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students engage with the discussion questions and activity to help them better understand what a worldview is and to explore their own worldview.

Discussion Questions

1. At the start of the video 1, Professor Redstone states, “We each have a worldview. It shapes how we take in information and how we understand and interpret the world. It becomes a lens through which we filter interactions, news, and communication.” What does she mean when she uses the term “worldview”?
2. Professor Redstone describes a research study that explains how one’s worldview shapes their reaction to events in the world. In the study she describes, one group was told they were watching a video of a political demonstration of anti-abortion protestors and the other group was told they were watching a video of protestors that support openly LGBTQ+ members in the military. How the groups reacted to the videos depended on their worldview. Four factors were presented to describe the two groups shown the political demonstration. They were attitudes about egalitarianism, hierarchies, individualism, and communitarianism. What does each term mean? If a person prioritizes one or another of these factors, what might that tell us about how they envision society?
 - a. Note to teacher:
 - i. Egalitarianism is the idea that all humans are equal in fundamental worth and moral status and that people should be accorded exactly equal rights. They should get the same, or be treated the same, or be treated as equals, in some respect, or they should treat one another as equals, should relate as equals, or enjoy an equality of social status of some sort.
 - ii. A hierarchy is the ranking of individuals or groups based on status or authority. Those who express egalitarian views likely would not support a hierarchy in which rights were not equally distributed.
 - iii. Individualism makes the individual the focus, and individualists promote independence and self-reliance over group identity. They advocate that the interests of the individual should take precedence over the state (country) or a social group.

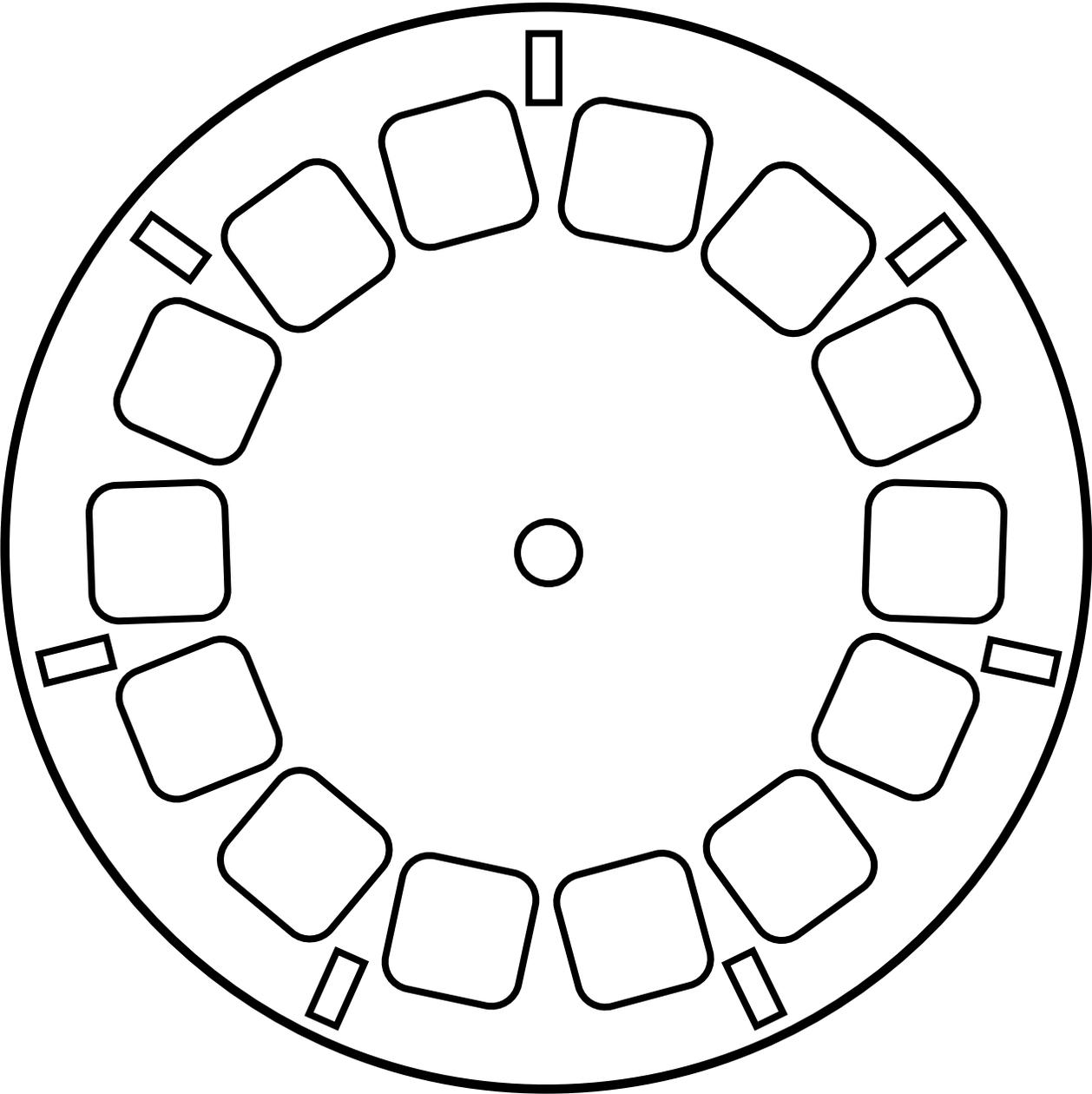
- iv. Communitarianism is the idea that human identities are largely shaped by different kinds of social relations or group affiliation. Communitarians, unlike individualists, are oriented towards decision-making based on what is best for a group or society over the individual.
3. Professor Redstone posits that discussion and debate over the best movie of the last 50 years or over the best way to hang toilet paper are less controversial topics to discuss and don't raise people's defenses, but more controversial topics such as whether schools or employers should use affirmative action do. Why does she think we should discuss controversial topics even if those topics raise your or someone else's defenses?

Classroom Activity: What is Your Worldview?

Similar to the demonstrators described in the video, your worldview is the lens through which you see the world. Use the reel on the worksheet below to describe the different filters you have. Think about your upbringing, interests, and experiences, then choose words or phrases to describe your worldview. Place each word or phrase in a separate box. Your worldview may include things that make up your physical identity (e.g., race or gender), cultural identity (e.g., ethnicity, region of the country you were born/live, ancestry, religion), familial identity (e.g., political orientation of parents, values of your parents), or something else that's important to you.

After you have completed the reel of your worldview, think about a controversial issue you care deeply about. How does your worldview shape your opinion about that issue? Write a one-page essay describing the issue and how your worldview shapes your opinion on that issue.

Reel for Classroom Activity: "What is Your Worldview?"



Video 2: The Problem with Unintentionally Treating Beliefs as Facts (4 minutes, 14 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students complete the discussion questions and activity to help them better understand the difference between objective facts and subjective beliefs, how facts and beliefs shape their worldview and opinions, and why we need to distinguish between the two.

Discussion Question

1. Everyone's worldview is shaped by facts and beliefs. What is the difference between the two? How do you know if someone is expressing a fact or belief?
2. Professor Redstone states, "When beliefs remain unacknowledged, we leave no room for others to have a different set." What is the problem with eliminating the space for different beliefs?
3. What does Professor Redstone mean when she says that to differentiate between facts and beliefs, we need the "humility to challenge what it is we think we know"?

Classroom Activity: Facts versus Beliefs

Revisit the issue you wrote about in the activity after the first video, "What is Your Worldview?" Write five facts related to the issue and five beliefs that you have about the issue. Pair up and share your issue with a partner, including the facts and your beliefs associated with the issue. Once you and your partner have both shared, ask questions of each other, and share how your belief about your partner's issue differ. During this activity, practice humility by staying open to new ideas, staying curious about your partner's beliefs, and asking questions without judgement.

Video 3: The Problem of Excessive Social Penalties (7 minutes, 41 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students complete the discussion questions to help them better understand the problem with using offense to determine whether speech should be penalized.

Discussion Questions

1. Professor Redstone differentiates between what a person intends by what they say and how another person responds to what is said. What is the difference between intent and offense (i.e., how the person responds)? How do people generally draw conclusions about someone's intent?

2. What is the problem with too broadly defining demeaning or offensive speech? What is the problem with penalizing speech when what is considered demeaning or offensive speech is too broadly defined? And who should decide what “too broadly” means?
3. What does Professor Redstone mean by “social costs”? Give an example of a high social cost. Professor Redstone asserts that we should take offense seriously, but what is the problem with using offense to determine whether someone deserves a social penalty?
4. Professor Redstone uses the example of affirmative action to describe a scenario in which a person who advocates against this sort of policy could be driven by hate or could have principled reasons for not supporting the policy, such as “it’s not the right way to help minority groups.” How does assuming bad intent (e.g., that the person is racist), rather than assuming a well-intentioned desire to find another way to help minority groups, affect open communication and problem-solving?

Video 4: The Problem of Telling People to Stay in Their Lane (5 minutes, 8 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students complete the discussion questions and activity to help them better understand the phrase “stay in your lane” and why it’s important to allow people to stray from their lane to speak about issues they have not personally experienced.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Professor Redstone mean by “stay in your lane”?
2. Professor Redstone asserts that some questions should be asked of a broader audience, not just of people who have personally experienced the issue. What types of questions should be asked of a broader audience, not just those who have had personal experiences.
3. What are the criteria for determining whether someone can stray from their lane to speak about an issue (three were listed and three were spoken)? Do you agree with those criteria? Should any be added or omitted?
4. Why might it be beneficial for individuals to stray from their lane to discuss issues?

Classroom Activity: Don’t Stay in Your Lane

Think of an issue about which you have strong opinions but have not personally experienced. Then pair with a partner to share why you think you (and others without personal experience of the issue) should be able to express an opinion about that issue.

After you and your partner have finished sharing, revisit the list of criteria for determining whether someone can stray from their lane. Based on your discussion, do you and/or your partner have anything to add to the list, or do you think any of the criteria should be removed?

Video 5: The Problem of Relying on Science to Bridge Divides (6 minutes, 9 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students complete the discussion questions to help them better understand why invoking science, or empirical evidence, might not work to bridge our ideological divides or differences in opinions.

Discussion Questions

1. Professor Redstone claims that data and science won't bridge our divides. Why won't data and empirical evidence bridge our ideological divides?
2. What often informs how we view and understand evidence?
3. Professor Redstone ends this video by stating: "even in a world in which everyone had perfect and identical information, we would still have very different opinions about how society should be structured, and that's a good thing." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Video 6: Putting the Lessons into Practice (5 minutes, 57 seconds)

After playing this video, have your students complete the discussion questions and activity to close out the video series. The questions below touch on key issues discussed throughout the video series and drive home the importance of viewpoint diversity. The activity allows students to negotiate diverse viewpoints to develop a goal related to tolerating different viewpoints for their school or classroom.

Discussion Questions

1. In this video, Professor Redstone discusses restricting social norms and social penalties. What are the costs to restricting or penalizing diversity of thought? What are the benefits of removing social penalties restricting diversity of thought?
2. Professor Redstone asserts that both intentions and feelings matter. How does she propose negotiating the two? How should the offended and offender respond to each other? What does it mean to give someone the benefit of the doubt?

Classroom Activity: Develop a Value Statement for Our School

Professor Redstone ends the video by stating: “The key, when the priority is maintaining tolerance for different viewpoints and welcoming dissenting voices, and when repeated interactions are likely, is to have a clear and explicit goal of the kind of environment an institution or organization wants to create.” Schools are diverse because they enroll students from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of worldviews. Does [name of your school] have a clear and explicit goal related to tolerating different viewpoints and welcoming dissent? Do you think an explicitly stated goal of this type would be helpful for our school environment? What should that goal be?

Teachers: Assign students to groups. To the extent that you know the views of your students, place them into groups that are politically, religiously, culturally, etc., diverse — in other words, groups that will hold a range of viewpoints. Instruct each group to develop a goal or value statement for the school to adopt. In addition, after they have created their statements, have each group develop a slogan and image that encapsulates the statement.

After each group has developed a statement, slogan, and accompanying image, have them present their final product to the school’s administration (if this is possible and welcomed). The administration can vote on the winner and adopt the statement, slogan, and image as an official stance of the school if they are so inclined. If conducting this sort of contest is not possible at the school level, do so at the classroom level and invite parents and other community members to be the judges.

Activity Extension

While watching the videos, pause to help students come to terms with the narrator — help them establish a shared understanding of the important words used in the videos. As Professor Redstone describes, part of the difficulty with coming to a consensus on controversial topics is a lack of mutual understanding about the definitions of the terms used to make arguments — e.g., “racism.” See the guide for *How to Read a Book* (Appendix K) for an activity that will facilitate students in coming to terms with the narrator of the videos.

This classroom activity and discussion question guide was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](https://heterodoxacademy.org).

APPENDIX U

Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

Arguments are presented to persuade someone of a particular view. Credible evidence is an important component of informed, persuasive arguments. When credible evidence is not available, the one presenting the argument often defaults to using other devices to sway thinking, such as logical fallacies. Logical fallacies are common errors in reasoning that undermine the logic of an argument. Fallacies can be illegitimate arguments or irrelevant points and are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim.

Students need to be aware of these fallacies to present their own viewpoints and engage in open inquiry effectively. One must avoid making fallacious arguments and identify fallacious arguments presented by others to productively engage in open inquiry and constructively disagree with the perspective.

This resource outlines common logical fallacies that students may have experienced in their own interactions or those in their social networks. Towards the bottom of the resource, there is a list of additional logical fallacies that students can research and suggestions for activities that can be adapted for high school or college students.

Common Logical Fallacies

Ad Hominem

Ad Hominem means “against the man”. Ad Hominem is when you attack the personal characteristics of the person you’re debating instead of attacking the argument the person is making. In political debates, this is known as “mudslinging”.

Example:

Candidate 1: “I’m for raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.”

Candidate 2: “You’re for raising the minimum wage, but you’re not even smart enough to run a business.”

Candidate 2 attacked the intelligence of Candidate 1 rather than the merits of the minimum wage policy proposed.

Anachronistic

Anachronistic is when you judge something from the past by today's moral standards. This fallacy is often committed when concepts and ideas are misappropriated in time.

Example:

"The statue of Abraham Lincoln should be removed because he did not sufficiently show that black lives matter."

The person making this argument uses modern-day standards of the Black Lives Matter movement to judge Lincoln's decisions during the Civil War.

Anecdotal

Anecdotal is when you use personal experience to make an argument instead of evidence. Arguments that rely heavily on anecdotal evidence overlook that one (possibly isolated) example can't stand alone as definitive proof of a greater premise.

Example:

"Basketball players are generally tall." "Actually... I know of this guy who was 5'9" and made it to the NBA..."

A basketball player who is 5'9" can exist, but that player does not refute the evidence that most basketball players are taller than 6'.

Appeal to Authority

Appeal to Authority is when you argue that if one credible source believes something, it must be true.

Example:

"My science teacher says that washing your hands is the most effective way to combat a disease. She is a biology teacher, so it must be true. Any evidence saying otherwise must be false."

The biology teacher may be correct, but additional evidence should be sought before concluding.

Appeal to Emotion

Appeal to Emotion is also known as *ad misericordiam*, which in Latin means "argument to compassion."

Appeal to Emotion is when you appeal to the compassion and emotional sensitivity of others when these

factors are not strictly relevant to the argument. You make a claim based on sympathy or empathy instead of just or logical grounds. This is a “pathos” appeal and is very common in commercials and is a common tactic of politicians.

For example:

“Sarah did not want to eat all of her food on her plate. To get Sarah to eat her food, her mom told her to think of all the starving children in the world who do not have food at all.”

Sarah eating all the food on her plate does not affect whether children elsewhere will go without food.

Bandwagon

Bandwagon is when you present what most people or a group of people think to persuade another to think the same way. By claiming “everyone is doing it,” you are appealing to the popularity of something to validate it.

Example:

“Everyone that I’ve spoken with thinks that raising the minimum wage will help workers, so we should raise the minimum wage.”

Support among the general population for a policy does not mean it is an effective policy.

Circular Argument/Reasoning

Circular Reasoning is when you begin with a claim you are trying to conclude with and when you restate your argument rather than prove it.

Example:

“Eric is a good communicator because he speaks effectively.”

The conclusion is that Eric is a good communicator, but no evidence has been presented to support this claim. Saying he is an effective speaker is the same as saying he is a good communicator.

False Dichotomy

False Dichotomy is when you simplify an argument by reducing it to two sides. An argument is presented as having only two sides when there are actually more. This is also called “either/or” fallacy or “black/white” fallacy — for example, you are either with us or against us.

Example:

"If you are against the war, then you don't support our troops."

This argument does not acknowledge that one can be against going to war and support troops.

Hasty Generalization

Hasty Generalization occurs when you rush to a conclusion before you have all the facts. Your argument is then based on insufficient or biased evidence.

Example:

"I heard that teenagers vandalized the park downtown last night. Teenagers are so irresponsible and destructive."

The person claims that all teenagers are irresponsible and destructive because of one incident and the actions of a few teenagers.

Motte and Bailey

Motte and Bailey is when you conflate two positions that share similarities, one modest and easy to defend (the "motte") and one much more controversial (the "bailey"). You advance the controversial position; then, when challenged or asked for evidence, you retreat to the less controversial position.

Example:

Activist: "Homeless people should have the right to shelter, food, and health care. They should be given an apartment for free, a monthly supply of food for a year, and free medical care for a year."

Politician: "I can get on board with food and health care for a year, but I don't support giving people a free apartment."

Activist: "Then you don't believe in the right to shelter, food, and health care for the homeless."

The "motte" is the rights that the homeless should have. The "bailey" is the specific policy prescriptions.

Moving the Goalposts

Moving the Goalpost is when you add related propositions during an argument with just enough content altered to continue an argument or change the argument's terms during the argument. This is done to avoid losing the

argument after the initial claim has been successfully counter-argued. Activists often do this to maintain support for (or outrage about) their issue of interest.

Example:

Activist: "Women will have equal rights when they are welcomed into the workforce."

Counter argument: "Women do hold many positions in the workforce as teachers, nurses, and other social service positions."

Activist: "Those aren't the same types of jobs as men have. Women won't have equal rights until they are employed in the same types of positions as men."

Counter argument: "Both men and women are directors of organizations and principals of schools."

Activist: "The proportion of men and women in those positions is not equal. Women won't have equal rights until all corporations hire the same number of women and men for leadership positions."

The activist started with a proclamation about what is necessary for women to achieve equal rights. When her claim was refuted, she moved onto another claim about what is needed for women to achieve equal rights.

Red Herring

Red Herring is when you focus on arguing for an irrelevant topic to distract the audience. This is done to avoid opposing arguments rather than addressing them.

Red Herrings were stinky fish used to throw hunting dogs off the scent and test them.

Example:

A reporter asks a politician about healthcare.

"Healthcare is an important issue in this country, just like national defense. During my four years as a senator, I helped increase our defense budget to protect citizens of this country."

The politician introduces the topic of national defense to distract the reporter from her original question about healthcare.

Slippery Slope

Slippery Slope is when you argue that if A were to happen, then B will happen, eventually leading to Z happening. In other words, the argument equates A and Z.

Example:

"If you don't let me go to the party, I'll be a loser with no friends. I'll never get a date and then die poor and lonely with five cats!"

This argument claims that by not going to one party, he will die poor and alone. But not going to a party does not necessarily lead to dying poor and alone.

Straw Man

Straw Man is when you attack a position that the other person does not actually hold, or when you try to weaken an opponent's actual position to discredit them by misrepresenting their argument.

Example:

Political candidate 1: "Private prisons should be closed because corporations should not make a profit from jailing people."

Political candidate 2: "So, you don't support workers? If you close private prisons, many people will lose their jobs."

Candidate 2 is trying to claim that Candidate 1 does not support worker's rights to discredit the argument for closing private prisons.

Often, Ad Hominem and Straw Man fallacies are intertwined.

Tu Quoque

Tu Quoque is also called "appeal to hypocrisy" and in Latin means "you too" or "you also."

Tu Quoque is when you answer criticism with criticism or turn an argument back around on the other person. You apply the logic that because someone has done something, that it justifies someone else doing the same thing.

Example:

Dad: "You can't quit baseball. Give it time and you will get better."

Child: "But you quit baseball, so I should be able to quit too."

The child is trying to argue that she should be allowed to quit baseball because her dad did rather than supporting why she should be allowed to quit.

List of Additional Logical Fallacies

Appeal to Ignorance	Gambler's Fallacy
Appeal to Nature	Genetic Fallacy
Begging the Claim/Question	Moral Equivalence
Burden of Proof	No True Scotsman
Card-Stacking	Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc
Correlation Not Causation Fallacy	Slothful Induction
Equivocation	Sunk Costs
Fallacy Fallacy	

Classroom Activity

Teach students about the 15 logical fallacies described in this resource. Once they have a grasp of the common logical fallacies, implement these activities.

1. Split your class of students into groups. Assign each group logical fallacies from the “list of additional logical fallacies.” Instruct each group to research, define, and provide examples for the logical fallacies they are assigned like has been done for the other 15 fallacies described in this resource.
2. Then assign each group logical fallacies from the 30 in this resource. Instruct each group to create a card for their assigned logical fallacies — see [this example of cards](#). Each card should:
 - a. Depict an interaction they have witnessed in public discourse (in news media, on social media, etc.).
 - b. Illustrate two people interacting, with one person using a logical fallacy in their argument with the other person. (Students may not use the examples provided in this resource.)
 - c. Include a brief definition of the logical fallacy they are depicting.

Additional Tips

Provide students with a poster board that is the appropriate size to hang around the classroom. By displaying the cards in the classroom, students will be reminded of what to avoid and be aware of when engaging in discussion with others.

To avoid unnecessary controversy in the classroom, instruct students not to depict people they know. In general, remind students that the assignment's goal is not to make fun of people (this would be an ad hominem attack) but to learn how to spot logical fallacies. However, urge them not to shy away from depicting controversial issues being debated in the public square.

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This guide was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

APPENDIX V

Introduction: “Seeking Disconfirmation” and “Challenging our Political Biases”

Created by William Reusch

Critical thinking is at the root of what education is about. Directing students into *how* to think, rather than *what* to think is how we help them grow into innovative, independent adults. Unfortunately, many classes in the traditional school model have replaced imagination with compliance. With the internet providing access to all the libraries in the world, memorizing information is becoming less and less valuable, but analyzing that data is become more and more valuable. Epistemology is often forgotten in school and that is doing our students a disservice.

Our nation has also become increasingly polarized. Due to new technology and media models, people are placed — willingly or not — into echo chambers of like-minded thinkers and, as a result, have difficulty understanding viewpoints that differ from their own.

Exercises like these help students challenge their own thinking and guide them down a pathway of deeper understanding of *why* they and others think the way they do. The focus can then shift from “blaming to aiming.” Individuals with opposing perspectives can thus have shared goals and work together on solutions — as small as individual conflict resolution and as big as global crisis.

Included are a broad and a specific example of how to guide your students. How you implement these exercises is up to you. I have typically used these as individual assignments, as breaking down specific ideologies and perspectives can often feel like a personal journey. Instructors are encouraged to adapt them based on class size, structure, curriculum, and student age.

The “Seeking Disconfirmation” (Appendix W) exercise asks students to choose a polarizing topic and examine their personal views on it. It can be used in nearly any class in any subject; for example, science, in the pursuit of truth, can have data corrupted by confirmation biases. Understanding various points of view is critical to literature. History’s telling of who “good guys” and “bad guys” are can be challenged as well.

The “Challenging our Political Biases” (Appendix X) exercise is a way of taking the principles of “Seeking Disconfirmation,” and applying them in more specific situations. Students are asked to think of the strongest arguments against their own beliefs, encouraging them to consider other viewpoints and their validity, even if they do not agree with those viewpoints.

Important Definitions

Straw Man Argument

A straw man is a form of argument and an informal fallacy based on giving the impression of refuting an opponent's argument, while actually refuting an argument not presented by that opponent. One who engages in this fallacy is said to be "attacking a straw man."

Steel Man Argument

The opposite of the straw man argument: the idea is to find the best form of the opponent's argument to test opposing opinions. The goal should be to argue the opposing viewpoint better than your opponent even can!

Example 1

Person 1: "George Washington was a wonderful president."

Person 2: "No, he was a slave owner" (Straw man argument)

Person 2: "He chose not to run for a third term, won the electoral college unanimously, and released his slaves upon his death. During his farewell address he warned us of factions and died a celebrated hero. That being said, even within the historical context, I feel that the fact that he owned slaves negates him from being considered a 'wonderful' anything" (Steel man argument)

Example 2

Person 1: "Abortion should be illegal."

Person 2: "What about in the case of incest or rape?" (Straw man argument, given the rarity of such cases.)

Person 2: "Science is very mixed about when life begins. I understand that those who support the "Pro-Life" side see the fetus as a human life, and when you view it that way, it makes sense to view it as murder. It is often an incredibly difficult decision for women and couples to make. While I feel this is an area that government should not have jurisdiction over, I see the fetus as reliant on the mother and see abortion as being her decision about what to do with her body, rather than murder." (Steel man argument)

This guide and the subsequent handouts titled "Seeking Disconfirmation" and "Challenging Our Political Biases" were originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](https://heterodoxacademy.org).

Seeking Disconfirmation

Created by William Reusch

Name: _____

Select a specific controversial topic where society seems polarized.

Topic: _____

1. Encapsulated into a single sentence, my opinion on this topic is:

2. Encapsulated into a single sentence, I believe those who oppose my viewpoint do so because:

3. Three media sources or individuals that best SUPPORT my viewpoint on this issue are:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4. Three media sources or individuals that provide the best arguments AGAINST my viewpoint on this issue are:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. If I were hypothetically presented with the following data or information, I would adjust my views and shift towards the opposing side. In other words, what could theoretically get me to change my opinion?

6. Three things I am genuinely curious about regarding this topic are:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

7. If I had a strong desire to better understand opposing viewpoints regarding this issue, the steps I would take would be:

Challenging Our Political Biases

Created by William Reusch

Name: _____

Complete the following. You may discuss it with other class members, but this is personal and should be completed individually. Cite all findings.

1. Write a quote you agree with that a politician you generally disagree with said (before, during, or after office):
2. Write an action you disagree with that was taken by a politician you agree with:
3. Choose three political or social positions you disagree with and provide the best arguments you can to support these positions. In other words, steel man the other side.

1) Issue: _____

Steel man argument:

2) Issue: _____

Steel man argument:

3) Issue: _____

Steel man argument:

Instructor Suggestions: Dialectical Thinking Classroom Activity

Created by Andrew Hartz

Goals

Dialectical thinking can help people understand issues more completely and accurately, develop more effective solutions, have more productive dialogue, improve their relationships with people with whom they disagree, and increase their emotional stability and mental health. The worksheet in Appendix Z aims to help people learn how to use dialectical thinking to explore a range of controversial, political, or academic topics.

Please feel free to use this worksheet in a flexible way based on the needs and constraints of your class. Below are some suggestions for using the worksheet.

A) Read the first page of the sheet as a class. Depending on the class, this can take 15–20 minutes.

1. Try to provide a concrete example or two as an exemplar that your students might have familiarity with (e.g., a current event). For example, you could ask them to think of a hypothetical child whose parents are getting divorced. What are some reasons this divorce might be good or bad for the family? Pros could include reducing conflict between the parents or helping the parents feel happier or more fulfilled, both of which can make them better parents. Cons could include the stress of the divorce process, the child's difficulty seeing both parents, and the sadness and stress to all involved. A more political example could also be helpful, such as Medicare for all. Pros are that everyone will have health insurance and similar programs have been successfully implemented in many countries. Cons are that it could be costly and inefficient (as most government programs are), implemented in a corrupt or unfair way, or that the country is too large or diverse to sustain such a program, all of which could lead to an increase in social divisions. Obviously, there's much more to say about both examples.
2. If you have time, you can ask your students for examples based on their experience to ensure that they understand the exercise before they begin. You can encourage students to provide examples from their personal lives, from academic readings, movies/fiction, or political controversies. Non-political examples may be especially useful as students gradually become acquainted with the concept. Take a few minutes for questions that may arise to make sure that everyone understands the general concept. A more detailed discussion can occur after the exercise is complete.

B) Complete the practice exercise on page 2. If students complete this as small groups in class, it is estimated to take 15–30 minutes.

1. You can choose one topic for the entire class, or let students select different topics for different small groups. Students can pick any topic they choose for the exercise (carbon tax, amnesty for undocumented immigrants, affirmative action in university admissions, an assault weapon ban, etc.). They should feel free to select a topic that is more academic or related to your specific course.
2. Encourage your class to select a topic that will challenge them best. The ideal topic should be difficult for students without being too controversial for them to discuss productively. This will depend on the knowledge students have of issues, their emotional maturity, their specific sensitivities, their desire to build their dialectical thinking ability, time limitations, and the interpersonal dynamics of the class.
3. We recommend this exercise be done in small groups of about 4–5 students. But, based on the size of your class and your time constraints, you can have students complete the assignment alone, together with the entire class, or as homework individually or in groups
4. After students complete the exercise, you can ask them to share their responses with the class, or you can move to the next step.

C) Discuss the reflection questions. Discussing all of these questions as a class could take up to 30–60 minutes.

1. The reflection questions are a crucial way to help students build their ability to think dialectically. It's very important to take time to do this adequately.
2. To encourage students to share their experiences, try to foster a non-judgmental environment and verbally state that goal to the class. It may help to share some of your own emotional difficulties if you feel comfortable doing so. You can also encourage students to share any thoughts, feelings, associations, observations, or reflections they've had — even if they seem exaggerated, irrational, conflicting, or contrary to what they expected. This may help more students open up if they are having difficulty.
3. Strong feelings are expected. If students deny having difficulty with the exercise, encourage them to consider what other people might experience. You may even want them to consider how they can advocate for more dialectical thinking in the world.

Additional Tips

1. Try to take a dialectical approach with students. Acknowledge the truth in points they make, and then encourage discussion of the other side whenever possible. Modeling dialectical thinking can help them utilize the concept. This may mean acknowledging the downsides of thinking dialectically itself. After all, it is true that sometimes when moral choices are stark, ambivalence can be counterproductive (e.g., mass murder).
2. Avoid arguing with students directly. If they disagree, encourage them to try out this line of thinking. They're free to reject it if they so choose.
3. Print out multiple copies of the sheet and complete more than one version of the exercise with students. This could enhance their ability to think dialectically.
4. Before the discussion, encourage students to write a 1–2-page response paper based on the reflection questions. That may lead to a richer discussion. Reflection papers after the discussion may also help them consolidate the emotional and cognitive capacities involved in thinking dialectically.

This guide, including the subsequent classroom activity and discussion questions, was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).

Classroom Activity: Dialectical Thinking

Created by Andrew Hartz

All-Or-Nothing Thinking

Understands viewpoints as all one thing or another — also called “Either/Or Thinking.”

All Good vs. All Evil	All Reward vs. All Risk
Totally Sane vs. Totally Crazy	100% of the Evidence vs. 0% of the Evidence
All Benefits vs. All Costs	Pure Altruism vs. Pure Selfishness
All Pro vs. All Con	Only Pure Intentions vs. Only Malice
Always Wise vs. Always Ignorant	Omnipotently Powerful vs. 100% Powerless
Only a Victim vs. Only a Victimizer	Others

Dialectical Thinking

Accepts that, in our daily lives, opposing sides almost always both have some merit — also called “Both/And Thinking.” Dialectical thinking involves the ability to take other’s perspectives and to accept uncertainty, ambiguity, and nuance.

Dialectical thinking is difficult because:

1. Social problems can be upsetting, and when we’re upset, we like certainty.
2. It’s hard to tolerate that there’s a lot we don’t know and don’t understand.
3. We can experience people who disagree with us as aggressive, arrogant, or rude, and when we do, it’s painful to acknowledge when they have a point.
4. We may fear that if we acknowledge that an opponent has a point, it will cause us to lose the argument.
5. We may worry that others will use concessions we make to invalidate our argument or hurt/shame us.
6. We may think that more extreme arguments are more persuasive/effective.
7. It’s difficult to acknowledge negative things about people or views we cherish.
8. Other reasons.

Despite these fears, dialectical thinking is more likely to:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Facilitate dialogue | Find effective solutions |
| Help us understand things | Help people get along with each other |
| Help us understand each other | Increase inclusion, empathy, and justice |
| Boost our emotional stability | Be more persuasive |

Occasionally, we all engage in all-or-nothing thinking, but it is generally helpful to use dialectical thinking whenever possible.

Practice Dialectical Thinking

Try to come up with at least three pros, three cons, and one uncertainty for an issue of your choice.

Try to think of the best arguments for all sides. A pro supports the argument, a con argues against it, and an uncertainty is anything that you yourself are unsure of that doesn't neatly fit as a pro or a con.

Avoid making "straw man" arguments (weak arguments you can easily defeat) for other viewpoints. Instead, make "steel man" (strong and challenging) arguments for the view with which you disagree. Also, try to include genuine uncertainties about the issue as opposed to "it may not go far enough" arguments.

Issue: _____

Pro:

1.

2.

3.

Con:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Uncertainty:

- 1.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe what it was like having to come up with both pros and cons of an issue. Did you have a hard time coming up with arguments for one side?
2. Look at the reasons dialectical thinking is difficult. Do one or more of those reasons resonate with you? For example, was it difficult to acknowledge negative things about issues or people we care about?
3. In going through the process of coming up with different arguments, did you think about the arguments any differently? Is there a position you are more willing to listen to that you hadn't previously considered?
4. How often do you read articles in the news or in your classes that reflect dialectical thinking vs. all-or-nothing thinking? Are there ways to consume information that could foster dialectical thinking? Are there other practices you could engage in that could help you increase your dialectical thinking?

This resource was originally published on [Heterodox Academy's website](#).



About Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy (HxA) is a nonpartisan nonprofit that works to improve the quality of research and education by promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning. Our community is made up of more than 5,000 professors, educators, administrators, and students who come from a range of institutions — from large research universities to community colleges. They represent nearly every discipline and are distributed throughout 49 states and across the globe.