

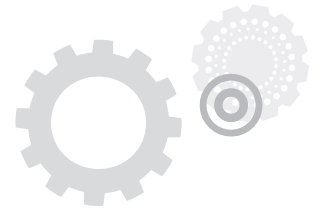
# MAKE UP YOUR MIND

A Classroom Guide to 10 Age-Old Debates

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## How to Use This Book

This book is divided into 12 chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of philosophical thinking, and each of the following chapters presents an insoluble contradiction that has engaged generations of thinkers. The book routinely calls these perennial contradictions other names as well, such as “dualities”, “debates” and “oppositions”. Although different terms may be used, a common history applies to all of them: Each refers to a long-standing debate over important ideas in the Western intellectual tradition.

If you are interested in this book, you are most likely a professional educator. Your discretion regarding what material to use from this book is both expected and encouraged. Each chapter is written so that it can stand alone. Use this book in its entirety or parts of it as you see fit. I wrote these lessons with my gifted middle-years students in mind, but they can also enrich English, humanities and social sciences, philosophy, maths and psychology classes. High school students will also benefit from these lessons – particularly if you wish to explore a certain topic in depth or create a cross-curricular unit. Some of the chapters address sensitive topics (e.g. religion, ethnicity), so you will need to judge the maturity and ability of your students and adapt the material accordingly.

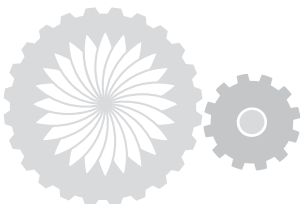
Beginning with Chapter 3, each chapter of this book uses the following format:

- ⚙️ **Introduction:** This section is written for teachers, primarily to provide overall objectives, background information and additional materials for lesson planning. However, you may choose to have gifted and advanced students read the introductory section if you believe they will benefit from its ideas.
- ⚙️ **Classroom Activities and Assessments:** This section contains a variety of reproducible activities you may use to teach the material and evaluate comprehension. Materials range from scripts used to stimulate student discussion to lesson plans, quizzes and student assignments. A guide to these classroom activities appears after each chapter's introduction.
- ⚙️ **Evaluation Criteria:** In each chapter, you will find some combination of reproducible marking criteria, rubrics and quizzes. Although suggested criteria and rubrics are provided where possible, many of the activities require subjective marking. Some of the included rubrics are fairly general, and this is by design, given the wide range of classrooms in which these materials can be used. It may be useful for you to use the rubrics and marking guidelines as a jumping off point, either modifying them or creating your own.

It is very important to point out that the classroom activities and other pedagogical materials in this book are not meant to be comprehensive. Each chapter skims the surface of a somewhat daunting topic, the goal being that students' interest will be sparked and their critical thinking skills engaged. Use the background information on each age-old dilemma as a foundation for any lesson or discussion you choose to design. I hope the materials provided will help you in this endeavour.

## Keeping a Discussion Alive: Some Suggestions From the Trenches

Most of the curricular materials in this book are designed to stimulate discussion. My students prefer to read scripts aloud in class, which often fosters discussion before the script is even finished. Other activities may also encourage classroom discussion, especially if students are asked to share what they have written for journal entries or assignments.



**If possible, control the size of the group.**

You may be able to have a classroom discussion with up to 15 students, but this number is the “tipping point” between conversation and chaos. If you have a large class (as most will), you may need to number students off and break them into discussion groups of approximately 4–6 students. You may then wrap up the discussion with comments from each group. Use the **Discussion Evaluation** slip (p. 10) to evaluate student discussions.

**Lay out some ground rules before any discussion begins.**

It is best to have a very simple list of 3–4 expectations for group discussions posted in the room. Better yet, post a list of the evaluative criteria on the Discussion Evaluation slip. These are excellent discussion expectations for any size group.

**Students may need to be taught how to have a discussion.**

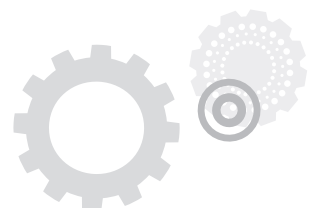
Unfortunately, for many students, discussion at home is rare and punctuated by noise from a television. Also, texting while among friends has become the norm, and thus students are often conditioned to attend to communication devices instead of people. There are many resources for how to teach discussion skills. Don't get overwhelmed; students mainly need practice and feedback about how they are going.

**Do not push an agenda in a discussion.**

Too often, discussions led by teachers, parents and other adults are simply vehicles for hidden curricula (actually fairly obvious curricula). Students learn how to say “the right thing” for credit, but they do not learn how to think for themselves.

**Do not try to reach a conclusion or right answer.**

For philosophical discussions such as those in this book, attempting to reach a definite conclusion will ultimately suppress discussion. Instead, use active listening techniques. Quickly summarise a student's comments and ask questions that will allow him or her to clarify terms, examine assumptions and evaluate the implications of his or her statements.



### Be Socrates!

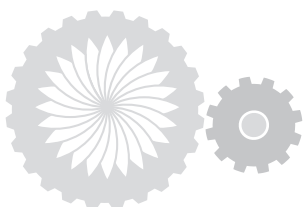
Listen carefully, summarise the student's statement quickly and accurately, and then ask additional questions. You can use some standard "starters" for your questions, such as the following:

- ⚙ What I hear you saying is ...
- ⚙ What thoughts led you to this conclusion?
- ⚙ (*Student's name*) says that (*repeat or rephrase student's point*). Who agrees with this?
- ⚙ I hear you saying (*summarise student's point*). Does anyone have a different opinion?
- ⚙ If what you are saying is true, then what should we do in the future?
- ⚙ If what you are saying is true, then why do other people have different opinions? What might you tell those people?
- ⚙ What kinds of people might be most likely to agree or disagree with you? Why?

### Use writing as a tool to improve the discussion's content.

You may want to try one of the following tactics:

1. Pose an open-ended question as a prompt, and have students write a response before they can speak. When you call on them, ask them to read what they have written.
2. Do the same as above, only instead of having students write individual responses, ask groups of 4–5 students to write comments or reactions to each other's responses. This activity may take some practice and prior instruction from the teacher so that students know how to react to one another appropriately and adequately.
3. Have students write responses to a question on note cards. Collect them and shuffle the deck before reading them aloud. You can instruct students to write their names on the cards, or leave them anonymous.
4. Assign students a question for the next day. Tell them that you will collect their written answers (as part of an assignment) prior to discussion.
5. Assign creative writing as a discussion prompt. Students may write R.A.F.T.s (wherein they are given a role, an audience, a format and a topic; see Culham, 2003), letters to particular historical or fictional



characters (e.g. Jane Goodall, Don Quixote), original dialogues and so on. Some ideas are included at the end of each chapter.

6. Have students come up with their own questions. Students may take turns assigning questions to peers in their groups or to the whole class. It is important to teach students about the structure and importance of open-ended questions before assigning this task. Too often, they will choose questions requiring simple yes or no responses, or questions that require only rote recall rather than careful thought.
7. Have students create a formal résumé for a famous individual (e.g. Galileo) or list what they would put on a Facebook page for the person.
8. Assign persuasive speeches, editorials, advertisements, public service announcements, billboards, bumper sticker slogans, T-shirt messages and other genres of written communication. All of these exercises can foster lively discussion, as students will relish the chance to be creative.

### **Manage the flow of discussion.**

It is helpful to distribute icy-pole sticks or other easily manipulated items as “tickets” to talk. Once a student uses all of his or her tickets, that student relinquishes the right to say anything more. This prevents any one student from dominating the discussion.

### **Monitor small groups.**

Have students trade off playing the role of facilitator for group discussions. For older students – particularly gifted and advanced students – the structure of assigning rigid group roles rarely works well. Generally, only the facilitator role can be assigned; students do not usually accept other manufactured roles, such as secretary or timekeeper, as they seem arbitrary.

### **Have students move around the room.**

If opinions begin to diverge, move students with similar opinions to one side of the room, and move those with another opinion to the opposite side of the room. Those students who are “on the fence” can remain in the middle. Both sides then try to convince those sitting in the middle to join them by using persuasive arguments. You may also assign discussion groups based on which students agree with one another. After the students write and talk, schedule a debate between the groups.

