

## Urban Debate League – February 2017 Curriculum

With so much having changed since your last meetings, students will probably want to take this month to reacquaint themselves with the basics of debate as well as to discuss prevalent topics in current events and their political implications. For that reason, debates this month will revolve around immigration with a focus on argumentation!

### Week 1 – Welcome Back! Providing Context and Generating Arguments

- Welcome Back! (15 minutes)
  - It's been a while! Take a few minutes to talk about winter break, the new semester, things they're looking forward to, etc.
  - Talk about what aspects of debate they'd like more work on, or what activities they'd like to spend more time on during practice
- Discussion of current events and general background information (25 minutes)
  - Current events
    - See how familiar students already are with some of the recent developments of the Trump administration, especially the immigration-related ones
    - Some important actions you should discuss:
      - Suspension of US refugee admissions for 120 days, and suspension of Syrian refugee program indefinitely
      - Blocking immigrants, visa holders, and green card holders from 7 Muslim-majority countries for 90 days
      - Wants to begin building wall on Mexican-American border
      - Has threatened to pull federal funding from sanctuary cities
    - The curriculum this month is going to be centered on immigration issues, but feel free to let students discuss/debate some of Trump's other policies or other current events for a bit, especially at the beginning, since this is the first practice in a while.
  - General background information
    - Figure out what preexisting beliefs students have about US immigration policy, and what they know about the history of immigration in the United States
    - Fill in any significant gaps in their background knowledge – feel free to add or leave out, just be sure to provide them with sufficient information to be able to contextualize ongoing debates about illegal immigration and refugee restrictions:
      - Though the US was founded as a nation of immigrants, the country has a long history of distrust and dislike of immigrants. Examples to mention include the Irish, the Chinese (Chinese Exclusion Act), and strict racial quotas.
      - The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 eliminated race as a basis of exclusion, the Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated nationality quotas
  - Start generating stock arguments
    - Set the stage for discussion throughout the rest of the month by spending some time asking students to come up with stock arguments why a country's

government/citizens would generally be for or against more immigration to that country.

- If students have trouble coming up with arguments, direct them in some of the following directions:
  - Pro-immigration
    - Humanitarian interests
    - More productive economy
      - Generally paying taxes, fulfilling/creating jobs, etc.
    - Greater diversity
      - Make sure to ask students what they think are the benefits of greater societal diversity
    - More skills brought into economy
    - Necessary for agriculture
  - Anti-immigration
    - Increased competition for jobs, resources, etc.
    - Erosion of a national identity
    - Crime (though people often grossly overestimate correlation between crime and immigrants, possibility of dangerous immigrants still exists and is widely discussed)
    - Expensive to incorporate into social safety net
    - “Brain drain” perpetuates international inequality
- Game (20 minutes)
  - End the first practice of the new year with a fun activity! Any debate-related game is fine but some suggestions are below:
    - Hot potato – have students sit in a circle. Start two objects at opposite points in the circle and have students pass the objects around as fast as possible until a coach tells them to stop, at which point the two students holding the objects should get into the middle of the circle. Give them a random, fun topic to debate. (A similar alternative to this is musical chairs, depending on the restrictions of the room)
    - Additional games can be found here:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MzMhLqind3zdE0E5n\\_8xuYiDQcYYgicVXrY4ZDhxacM/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MzMhLqind3zdE0E5n_8xuYiDQcYYgicVXrY4ZDhxacM/edit)

## **Week 2 – The Refugee Crisis and Moral Arguments**

- Background information (15 minutes)
  - Ask if students know what a refugee is
  - Discuss Syrian refugee crisis to gauge familiarity
    - There’s no need for you to provide extensive history into the Syrian Civil War if you don’t feel comfortable with it, beyond a general overview of the various actors: Assad regime, Syrian rebel groups, Russia, US, other Middle Eastern countries (namely Iran and Turkey) acting to shift regional power dynamics in their favor
    - The most important thing to establish is the extent of the humanitarian crisis – millions of Syrians have been killed, many of those who haven’t are displaced from their homes and are fleeing to neighboring countries to escape the violence and destruction. Nearly 5 million have already been

resettled as registered refugees, an additional ~6 million are internally displaced within Syria

- Argument generation and delivery (20 minutes)
  - Have students get into small groups and come up with a few arguments either for or against taking in more refugees, from the perspective of the US
  - After some time to brainstorm, have one or more members of each group give a short speech summarizing their arguments
  - If you have time, allow other members of the group to make short rebuttals to points brought up by other groups on the opposite side
- Discussion of moral/philosophical arguments (10 minutes)
  - Many of the areas of clash in a debate about the refugee crisis are moral and/or philosophical in nature – namely, what obligation has a country have to others as opposed to its own citizens, what obligation a country has to pursue humanitarian causes internationally, etc.
  - Briefly discuss the importance of rights-based arguments in debate – in many cases, the debate will boil down to two main areas of clash: the principles and the pragmatics. It's possible to win the debate if you only win one of the two areas, if you're able to show why your principle is more important or why the opponent's principle isn't that important.
  - Ask for some examples of moral argumentation and warranting
    - Ex. The right to life should be protected before anything else – why? Because the right to life is needed to access or enjoy any other rights, so it is the most fundamental and should be protected at all costs
    - Ex. Governments have an obligation to protect members of the international community that are in need because there's no substantive difference between a country's citizens and refugees seeking resettlement apart from their draw in the lottery of birth
    - Ex. Governments don't have a significant obligation to those who aren't citizens because citizens abide by a certain set of laws and in return, that government is beholden to those citizens and is more obligated to act on their behalf. The basis of the international system of nations is that governments act on behalf of their own citizens and not on others.
  - Practice rebutting some of these moral arguments – moral claims often have an opposing claim that could be made just as compelling
- Moral dilemmas (15 minutes)
  - To end with a fun activity, spend a little more time considering moral arguments and philosophical clash by reading some moral dilemmas and discussing what you would do in each scenario. Pick whichever ones seem fun and interesting!
    - <http://www.friesian.com/valley/dilemmas.htm> The trolley problem is a classic that could be a good jumping-off point
    - <http://psychopixi.com/uncategorized/25-moral-dilemmas/> “The Plagiarized Report” is likely more accessible and relatable than some of the others
    - [https://www.buzzfeed.com/tracyclayton/moral-dilemmas-that-will-break-your-brain?utm\\_term=.vo6N2Ngk1#.dcAegeplA](https://www.buzzfeed.com/tracyclayton/moral-dilemmas-that-will-break-your-brain?utm_term=.vo6N2Ngk1#.dcAegeplA) (lol I love BuzzFeed)

### **Week 3 – Illegal Immigration and Practice with Weighing**

- Background information (15 minutes)
  - Ask students what they already know about illegal immigration in the United States

- Discuss common areas of clash/misconception on the issue, establish a few facts to serve as a basis for debate on illegal immigration:
  - In 2014, there were a little over 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US, including 8 million in the workforce
  - In 2014, immigrants from Mexico made up 52% of unauthorized immigrants in the US, and the share continues to decline, mostly replaced by immigrants by Central America
  - In 2014, about 2/3rds of undocumented immigrant adults had lived in the country for over a decade
- Ask what the students know about common proposals made to deal with the issue of illegal immigration
  - Define key terms like amnesty (granting of official pardon) and the DREAM Act (legislation providing undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children a path toward legal status if they attend college or serve in the military)
  - Discuss concepts like sanctuary cities, “anchor babies”, a border fence/wall, a path to citizenship
- Brainstorm arguments (10 minutes)
  - Have students brainstorm arguments for and against progressive immigration policy (ex. “for” would include creating a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants currently in the US, “against” would include investing more in border security)
  - Write arguments on the board
  - Feel free to offer some suggestions if students have trouble thinking of arguments; many of the general stock arguments mentioned in Week 1 are applicable.
  - Make sure students use what they learned last week and consider the number of philosophical/moral issues like one’s right to a better life, the scope of a government’s obligation to serve people not of their country, etc. What separates a citizen from a non-citizen?
- Discussion of how to weigh (10 minutes)
  - Briefly discuss why it’s important to actively compare arguments during debates
    - You probably have a lot of arguments on the board at this point for either side – what happens during a debate if both sides make all of these arguments?
    - Topics aren’t one-sided, usually each side has some offense
    - Also much easier for judges to make decisions if you can do the comparative work for them
  - Ask students what makes some arguments more important than others
  - Fill in the gaps in students’ suggestions:
    - Scope (what impacts more people, countries, etc.? what groups matter more than others?)
    - Severity (what has a greater impact?)
    - Reversibility (what impact will probably or potentially be reversed?)
      - Ex. Climate change is really hard to reverse, so impacts about climate change have extra weight
    - Timeframe (what will have the longest impact?)

- Ex. We're usually OK with exchanging short-term harms for long-term benefits. We take gross medicine today because it'll make us feel better for a while.
    - Probability (what has the greatest likelihood of happening?)
  - Practice weighing and delivering (10 minutes)
    - Have students take turns making short speeches in which they choose one argument from gov and one argument from opp and explicitly weigh the two
    - If students seem to be having trouble getting started, first have a group discussion about which arguments are the strongest for each side, and for what reasons
  - Game (15 minutes)
    - Any game that gives students practice with weighing is fine; one suggestion is "Mine is bigger"
      - Coaches should write a number of different random impacts on small pieces of paper and fold them up – feel free to make them practical or ridiculous, anything from zombie apocalypse to US economic collapse
      - Pass out the sheets of paper (saving one for a coach) and give each student a minute to prepare
      - Have a coach start by giving a 1-minute speech as to why their impact is really important
      - Then have each student follow by giving 1-minute speeches explaining why their impact is more important than all the impacts before them

#### **Week 4 – Practice Debate Rounds!**

- Hold debate rounds with an emphasis on applying the skills practiced this month: generating arguments, using moral arguments, and weighing. Below are some potential topics, but feel free to use one of your own if you've already discussed this or students don't show interest. Provide whatever context is necessary!
  - This House supports sanctuary cities
  - This House would prefer a world with open borders
  - This House believes that countries have obligations to protect citizens of other countries
- To ensure audience participation, ask students to flow the speeches even if they're not debating. If the speakers feel comfortable, consider discussing positive feedback and constructive criticism after each speech and/or round.