



The OPPI debate:

# A case for common ground

Team-building, Model Singapore Parliament, Debates

In traditional, facilitated debates, there is a panel of active, impartial judges and a passive audience.

But this does not simulate the unpredictability of discussions in our everyday lives, where emotions and personal agendas come into play.

If we were to switch up these traditional dynamics and have the audience actively participate and the judges observe passively, what would happen then? Can debates function by having both sides seek out common ground?

Move towards a new form of debating that seeks participation and solidarity across differences to create a more united class.

## Resources required:

- Students' personal mobile devices with Internet access
- Timer
- Desktop/laptop
- Projector
- (optional) '15s left' card and a rule card

## Lesson objectives:

- Empower the classroom to actively engage with learning and perspective-taking by reinventing debate dynamics.
- Encourage students to apply their knowledge by simulating unpredictable, real-world scenarios.
- Nurture inquiring and reflective young minds that evaluate the nature of arguments.

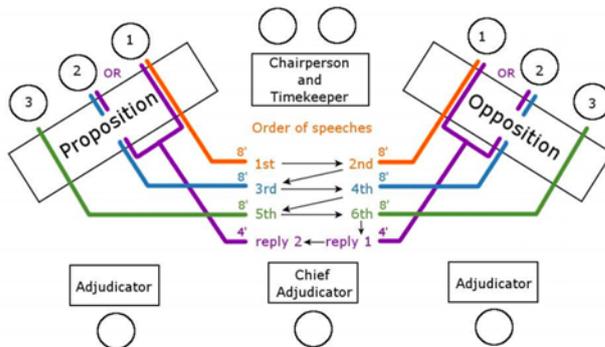


Fig.1: The debate layout

Taken from "A Quick Introduction to Debating in schools" by Debating Society Germany

### Pre-lesson preparation

The teacher will prepare seven debate motions and upload them onto an OPPi poll.

Depending on the number of students, the teacher will divide the class into groups of four to five.

The teacher will then assign one of the seven motions to every two groups, and allocate each of the two groups a stand (i.e. opposition or proposition).

Depending on the intention of the lesson, students will then be given time to research and prepare for the debate.

Note\*: There are many debate modalities, so teacher has to determine what is the right modality.

## Lesson Plan:

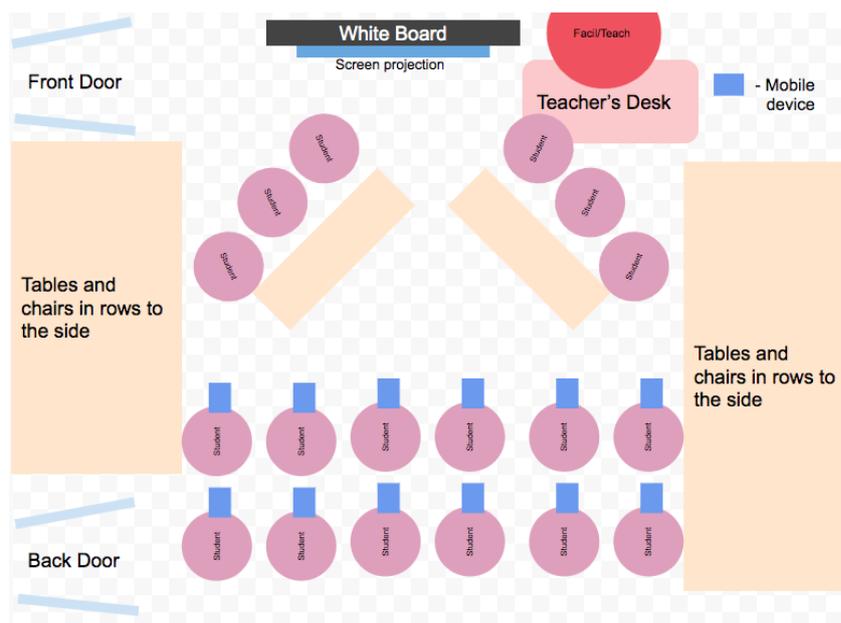
Teacher gives a brief of what is to happen during the lesson, making sure to only give out the passcode to the poll until the debate officially begins. Students should also not key in their email address till the end of all 7 debate motions.

The first two groups will go up to the front of the class for the debate. The remaining students will form the audience.

The first statement in the OP Pi poll will be flashed on the screen in front of the class.

The debate will commence once all audience members have voted on the statement. During the debate, the audience will be able to edit their responses to the statement in real time if they've changed their minds.

The audience will also be encouraged to send in further thoughts or opinions that they might have regarding the statement being debated. (Note: these statements will only come into play at the end of the activity).

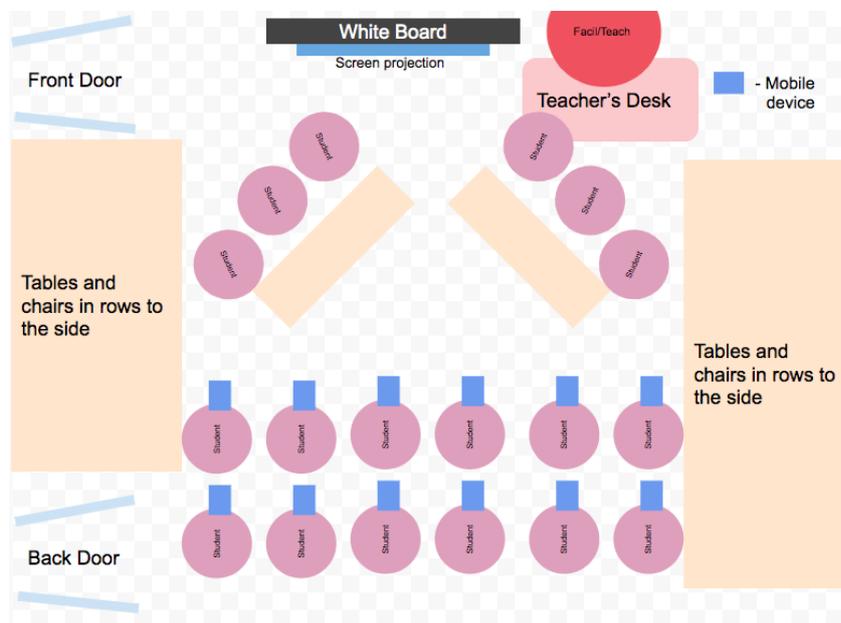


Proposed seating arrangement

## Lesson Plan (continued):

Throughout the course of the debate, the teacher listens attentively to different arguments made by the students and take notes. These observations will be brought in during the final reflection part.

A timer will be used to time each speaker (given about 30s to 1min of speaking time). When 15s are left, the teacher either taps the table or raises a “15s left” sign



Proposed seating arrangement

At the end of the debate, the next two teams will go up to the front of the class for their turn, while the audience members respond to the next statement in the poll. The activity will be repeated until all seven debates have been concluded. During the MCQs that appear every few statements, the class can take this time to take a 2 min break. MCQs can be framed for post-lesson feedback.

(optional) When all seven debates have been concluded, the results of the poll will be flashed on screen, and the victors for each debate will be declared in one of these two ways:

The groups in each round that found the highest % of common ground.  
(One winner)

The two groups in each round that have the highest % of division. (Two winners i.e. a tie)

### Lesson Plan (continued):

At the end of the debate

The teacher will flash the collected statements contributed by the audience over the course of the activity to facilitate a further discussion on each debate.

The class may then be divided into smaller groups for discussion, allowing for the teacher to review the comments and “enable” statements for impromptu debate if time permits.

In each round, if the winning group succeeded through finding common ground, the teacher could raise an observation like this for the class to think about:

The winning group argued on the basis of common ground.

If the groups that argued with polarising views win, the teacher could ask the class:

**What's the consequence of using division to win?**

**Did both groups use arguments that resonated with sentiments on the ground?**

**Example:**

On the motion “Julius Caesar is a threat to the Roman Republic”, the winning group achieved a high % of common ground.

What kinds of arguments did the winning group raise? Why did majority of the audience agree with these ideas?

On the motion “Brutus did not hate Caesar”, both groups garnered a significant % of support, and is thus tied.

Why were both sides of the argument effective in garnering support? What other points of view did the audience raise?

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **What is the meaning behind the entire debate? Why and how does OPi change the experience?**

With such a debate format, our hope is to help students see beyond traditional markers of what is 'right' and 'wrong', and take ownership of the nuance added to the discussion. It encourages them to be inquisitive and has everyone - not just those who have the floor - participate.

As a platform, OPi - with its back-end algorithm - visually shows points of division and consensus in the class, at the same time, revealing what everyone thinks and where the individual student stands on the topic of discussion. From there, we want students to realise that while there are differences in society, we can still find points for solidarity and bridge gaps for the purpose of a common goal.

### **Can the student choose whether they want Proposition/Opposition?**

No, ideally they should be assigned. When it comes to the purpose of this exercise, it's really about perspective-taking and breaking out of echo chambers. Even if students find themselves disagreeable with the statement or unable to form an argument, this still pushes them to reflect and think about the opposing side.

### **Should we do all 7 statements?**

It depends on the teacher and time allotted. Even though we would like for all 7 statements to be debated on by the end of the lesson, the situation may not allow for it. If this is the case, the teacher can proceed to ask the class to answer the remaining questions and fill in their email address. The teacher can move on to the post-debate section and review the results.