

Debate Guide

Why do we hold a debate?

Debates help students think deeply about texts by engaging with multiple perspectives and interpretations of grade-level text. Through debate, students learn to construct and evaluate arguments, use textual evidence, and respond thoughtfully to others, all key practices of critical readers.

Debate setup and structure

In a STARI debate, students:

- ▶ work collaboratively
- ▶ construct arguments grounded in the text and sound reasoning
- ▶ cite evidence to support their claims
- ▶ engage in structured exchanges where teams present and respond to arguments
- ▶ reflect on both their thinking and the discussion process.

STARI teachers have successfully implemented debates in a variety of ways. Some teachers assign students to teams, positions and roles. Others allow students to choose a position. Each STARI unit suggests a debate structure, but teachers are encouraged to adapt format, roles and pacing to best support their students.

Debate Question

In *The Skin I'm In*, who has the power, Maleeka or Charlese?

Debate Schedule	
<i>Prepare for Lesson 42: Review debate plans</i> Lesson 42: Introduce debate question and scaffold evidence collection 1. Mini-lesson: What is debate? 2. Introduce debate question 3. Collect evidence from the hamburger scene: Whole class work 4. Collect evidence from the scene at Char's house: Partner work	<i>Prepare for Lesson 43: Plan team assignments</i> Lesson 43: Collect evidence 1. Mini-lesson: What does it mean to have power? 2. Assign teams 3. Collect evidence from Chapters 25-32: Partner work within teams
<i>Prepare for Lesson 44: Plan role assignments, print role badges (available via the STARI Download Center)</i> Lesson 44: Build arguments 1. Mini-lesson: Persuasive phrases 2. Assign roles 3. Explain roles 4. Teams build arguments	Lesson 45: Debate 1. Teams rehearse 2. Debate preview 3. Debate 4. Debrief

Considerations for multilingual learners



STARI debates provide rich opportunities for multilingual learners to practice academic language, reasoning, and oral communication. Debates also serve as opportunities to notice how students use language to reason, agree, disagree, and cite evidence. Briefly naming or modeling these language moves supports both comprehension and language growth for all students.

Language supports should amplify access to complex ideas, not simplify them. All students are provided structured preparation time and clear roles. The goal is not perfect language, but meaningful participation in text-based reasoning.

To further support MLs in your classroom, consider this decision tree. Use scaffolds strategically and fade them as students gain independence.

IF students struggle with...	Look for/Listen for this evidence	THEN try...
Generating ideas or getting started	Long pauses; students say “I don’t know”; limited notes or evidence gathered	• Pausing for partner or small-group rehearsal • Revisiting the debate question together to clarify the task • Valuing developing responses (Treat partial or emerging language as part of learning while pressing for clarity, evidence, and reasoning.) • Leveraging home language (Some students may benefit from drafting ideas in their home language or using bilingual resources before sharing in English.)
Participating equitably in discussion	Same students speak repeatedly; some students speak very softly or not at all	• Using Turn and Talk or small group discussion before whole-class sharing • Using Goal 2 talk moves (“Who can rephrase or repeat...?”) to make sure all voices are heard and encourage students who are hesitant to share their own ideas • Assigning roles strategically (Match roles to students’ strengths while maintaining high expectations for participation over time.) • Arranging students so they can see and respond to one another (e.g., circles or grouped desks; this reinforces that debate is about building ideas together.)
Using evidence from the text	Opinions without citations; vague references (“it says somewhere...”)	• Redirecting students to the text • Prompting students to quote or point to specific lines • Providing evidence sentence stems

IF students struggle with...	Look for/Listen for this evidence	THEN try...
Expressing ideas in academic language	Hesitation, word-searching, reliance on informal or home language patterns	• Offering sentence stems • Allowing rehearsal with a partner • Encouraging drafting ideas in a home language before sharing
Sustaining productive debate norms	Side conversations; disengagement; arguments drift off topic	• Briefly restating norms and roles • Refocusing students on the question and evidence