

The Leaders' Debate

Overview

In this activity, students will discuss what they believe are important qualities for the Premier to have. This discussion will prepare students to evaluate the party leaders' performances in the televised debate. After filling out the worksheet provided, students will share their assessments of the leaders' performances with the class.

Objectives

- ▶ Students will be able to identify the leaders of the major provincial parties and what their positions are on major issues debated in the election.
- ▶ Students will further develop a sense of which party they wish to support and be able to communicate why.

Background

For a vast number of voters, the **televised leaders' debate** is the deal breaker when it comes to deciding who to vote for. The debate and the subsequent media and public interpretations of the leaders' performances can act as a turning point in an election campaign or reinforce already existing assumptions among voters.

While it's difficult to define a 'winner' or 'loser' of any debate, the decision is often subjectively made on the part of the viewer, and is decided based on criteria similar to that listed below in the debate evaluation.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Socials 5-7: "Defend a position on a selected topic."

Socials 8-10: "Assess a variety of positions on controversial issues."

Socials 10-11, Civics 11: "Apply critical thinking skills including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions and defending a position."

English 5-7: "Listen purposefully to understand ideas and information, by summarizing and synthesizing main ideas and supporting details..."

Preparation and Materials

- ▶ Attempt to locate footage of past debates, particularly 2005 for class viewing. This can be done with a television or online, using a projector. Consult <http://www.cbc.ca/bcvotes2005/radiotv/050504.html> as an online starting point (particularly 'Debate Reaction' and 'Political Panel Reviews the Debate').
- ▶ In preparation for the leaders' debate, clip articles from the newspaper or other media sources that can be shared with students to help them understand the debate and its purpose.
- ▶ This activity will be most effective if it is organized into three parts: an in-class introduction, a take home assignment on the night of the debate and a follow-up discussion in class.
- ▶ Make photocopies of 'Evaluating the Leaders' Debate' worksheet, two for each student.
- ▶ Be sure to make your students aware of the debate in advance so they can arrange viewing at home.
- ▶ The morning following the Leaders' Debate, find several newspaper articles for student analysis or prepare to use a computer lab for student research.

Timeframes

This activity will take approximately 1 hour of class time, with additional home viewing time additional. If you choose to view this debate in-class, anticipate another hour of class time invested in this activity.

Activity

Part 1

1. Begin by asking students at random: What are the qualities of a good leader? Write some of their suggestions on the board. Then ask: Are those the same qualities you would ask for in a political party leader? A Premier?
2. Introduce the debate process (students may already be familiar with the concept if they completed Activity 9 in the Secondary Curriculum Resource). Ask students:
 - What is the format of a debate?
 - Is a debate an effective way for leaders to highlight their platform and message? Are there better ways to engage electors (e.g. advertising, websites)
 - Who gains the most from a televised debate - the leaders or the public?
 - Is a debate enough for the public to make their decision? Do you think too many people use solely the debate to make their voting decision? Not enough?
 - Does the leaders' debate distract attention away from the local candidate?
 - Who should be involved in the leaders' debate - all of the parties, or just those parties with seats in Legislature (and if so, do you students remember which parties currently *have* seats in the Legislature? Would that be fair?)

Teacher Note: You may want to ask if students recall what happened during the Federal Leaders' Debate regarding the one major party leader who was originally denied a spot in the televised debate. This may lead into a lively discussion.

3. If you were able to locate footage from a past leadership debate, play an excerpt for your students. Consult <http://www.cbc.ca/bcvotes2005/radiotv/050504.html> for a starting point of audio and video. 'Debate Reaction' is particularly good for illustrating in part how a debate can be 'won'. Discuss students' initial impressions.
4. Distribute copies of 'Evaluating the Leaders' Debate' worksheet (two for each student) and review as a class.
5. Explain to students that they must watch the Leaders' Debate (with at least one family member or friend of voting age, if possible) and complete the assignment. The second copy of the worksheet is for this additional viewer. Encourage independent evaluation and discussion after the debate concludes.
6. Ensure that students are aware of the time and date of the debate in advance. Make a school-wide announcement about the debate and encourage all students and staff to view it (suggest only ½ hour of viewing time to make this achievable).

Part 2 - Home Viewing

Part 3

7. Following the debate, review the results of the take home assignment with students. How many students had friends or family fill out the other sheet?
 - Is there a general agreement among the results for a clear 'winner'?
 - Does the debate change your views about any of the leaders?
 - Do the opinions of family and friends differ greatly from the students?
 - Could students create a way to highlight their review of the leaders' debate that could be shared with the rest of the school on morning announcements? Do the students feel

that this may relieve the responsibility of the rest of the school in doing their own research on who to vote for?

8. Ask students to spend one or two moments writing a one-sentence summary of the debate. Have them share these perspectives with the class.

9. Using the computer lab or newspaper articles that you have accumulated, have students compare their thoughts to media reports.

- Are there major differences between students' views, family/friends' views and the media's?
- Did the media pick up on any details missed by the students?
- Could a media article's strong opinions sway the viewpoint of an elector?

Critical Reflection Questions

- ▶ If you could have asked the leaders one question in the debate, what would it have been? Why?
- ▶ Are there platforms you like, but leaders you don't, or vice versa?

Evaluation and Assessment

Students can be evaluated on their in-class discussions in Parts 1 and 3, as well as their completion of their '**Evaluating the Leaders' Debate**' worksheet.

Extensions

In class:

- ▶ If possible in advance of the debate, have students submit questions to the network carrying the debate for consideration.
- ▶ If watching the debate at home will not work for number of your students, you may want to opt to record the debate and watch it together the following day in class.
- ▶ For bonus marks, ask keen students to write an article of a youth perspective on the debate and pitch it to local media.
- ▶ Simulate an in-class leaders' debate with students divided up in party roles. Student should research the stances on each major issue that their party stands for and take notes during the formal debate.

WORKSHEET

Evaluating the Leaders' Debate

Leader 1: _____	Party: _____
Leader 2: _____	Party: _____
Leader 3: _____	Party: _____
Leader 4: _____	Party: _____
Leader 5: _____	Party: _____

EVALUATION FORMAT (1 = very poor, 5 = exceptional)

Assess the performance of each leader on the following:

- a) Key points are stated clearly, factually and logically.
- b) Arguments are appropriate, relevant and maintain focus.
- c) Key points are supported by quality evidence (details, examples, explanations)
- d) Displays poise, persuasiveness, confidence, eye contact and posture.
- e) Persuasiveness is used with control and consideration for opponent(s).
- f) Rebuttal exposes weakness of the other side in a respectful manner (is not sarcastic or derogatory).
- g) Control of his/her role in the debate is maintained.
- h) Final remarks are concise and an effective summary of key points.

Source: Classroom Criteria from A to Z - Teachers Resource Handbook

Based on the above criteria, please fill in your evaluation for each leader in the chart below.

Leader	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total Score	Notes