

Stand Where You Stand



Day 1:

In a library classroom

Students are brought to the library at the time they are studying a controversial issue, important in their breadth field. After a brief introduction to the library, half the class is asked to find two articles online supporting the idea and the other half to find two articles online opposing it. The instructor and librarian help the students find four worthy articles.

Reading the four articles is assigned as homework.

Day 2:

In your classroom

The next day in class the instructor makes a claim that reflects one side or the other, for example, Resolved: That the United States federal government should substantially decrease its authority either to detain without charge or to search without probable cause.

1. Students spend ten minutes writing down their position and their rationale, citing arguments, and evidence.
2. The teacher places four large signs in the corners of the room, "Strongly agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." Students are asked to stand by the sign that reflects their position.
3. Students in each corner of the room take turns presenting arguments that support and justify the stance they have taken, using the four articles that they read for homework.
4. Students are asked to move to another corner of the room if they are persuaded by their peers' arguments seem more accurate or defensible than their own previously held positions.
5. A 10-minute discussion period at the end of class provides time to share how the activity altered perspectives on the issue, and the importance of doing research, finding good sources, and critically examining and trying to understand others' points of view in a democracy.

Variation: Each student can be asked to suggest a question they want their classmates to answer. After collecting the slips, the teacher can read one question at a time and the questions can be discussed. The students might notice that some questions don't provide useful information. (Gail Knapp)

Variation: If desired, three signs can be used, "yes," "no," and "?"

Variation: Myths in a field can also be used instead of resolutions. e.g. Males are inherently better in math and science. (Shelby Morrison)



Concepts

- There are many sources of information on complex issues which take time to digest.
- People who propose simple solutions to complex problems may be ignoring information or distorting evidence.

Skills

- Using databases to find articles
- Choosing search terms
- Locating scholarly articles
- Skimming
- Recognizing quality indicators in sources
- Looking for evidence
- Articulating arguments
- Reflecting on issues

Adapted from Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, 2nd ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2005): pp. 117-118.