

Walking Debate

Oral Language Strategy Sheet

An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí
JuniorCYCLE
for teachers

A walking debate is a useful and fun strategy to develop your students' communication and critical thinking skills. In the best walking debates you will see a lot of movement as students' minds are changed by powerful arguments made by their peers.

Learning Outcomes

By choosing to engage in this activity the following learning outcomes will naturally be encountered:

OL1, OL2, OL7, OL9, OL11

Key Skills

Communicating
Managing Myself
Staying Well
Management Information and Thinking

Student Friendly Learning Intentions: Students will:

Be encouraged to express individual viewpoints on chosen topic(s)
Interact with others and share their experiences to reinforce/change their viewpoints.
Listen actively and speak with confidence about their viewpoints

Preparation

You may need to clear a space at the front or back of your classroom to allow students to move freely.

Tack **three sheets of paper** to the walls. One sheet should say 'Agree', opposite that you'll hang 'Disagree' and somewhere in between you'll hang 'Not Sure'.

You'll need a pre-prepared **selection of debate topics** or statements. A quick internet search of 'debate topics' should furnish you with plenty of ideas!

Instructions

Having pinned three signs to the wall (*Agree*, *Disagree* and *Not Sure*) the teacher calls out the motion for a debate and all students must move to the sign that corresponds with their opinions. Students are then called upon to explain/justify their position.

If something that a student says strikes a chord with other students they can signal their change of opinion by physically moving towards the student who is speaking.

You can be creative with the 'rules' of a walking debate – there is no fixed way of organising this.

Tip: You may find that some students initially just follow their friends, and some will physically hide behind the largest group in order to avoid speaking. In a supportive and fun environment it's possible to draw these students out. It's actually kinder to ask the shyest students to explain why they agree or disagree very early in the discussion before all the most obvious arguments have been exhausted by others.

Tip: When you first try a walking debate, it may be necessary for you, as the teacher, to continually ask questions and prompt people to explain or elaborate. As your class get used to the strategy you may be able to step back more and allow the students to challenge and rebut each other's arguments in a respectful manner.

Tip: If you find that students' ideas are not very developed, it might be a good idea to build some thinking time into the exercise. You could also allow time for student to discuss their opinions in pairs or threes before asking them to share with the room at large.