



Argumentation Activity: Refutation Two-Chance

Overview

The Refutation Two-Chance activity focuses on counter-arguments and the refutation of counter-arguments. In this way the activity exercises students' critical thinking skills, along with their ability to critique and identify flaws in a contrary argument (especially its evidence and reasoning), in addition to defending one's prior argument against critique.

This activity is designed to take about 3 class periods.

Method and Procedure

1. Establish and explicate a debatable issue. This issue should be binary (two-sided). Define terms and cover the points of background knowledge required to begin to read about and discuss the issue. Connect this issue to students' prior knowledge.
2. Distribute a small set of media sources – readings, website links, videos, images. These should be balanced between sides of the debatable issue, and can include one or two background or "both sides" articles or links.
3. Have students work on argument-based questions accompanying these media sources. Students can work in pairs or small groups of three on them. Then share



out responses, building students' understanding of the arguments and their evidence and reasoning on both sides of the issue. You have the option of collecting the responses and formatively assessing them.

4. Divide the class into two halves, assigning each half with one of the sides – affirmative or negative, pro or con, on the debatable issue. We generally recommend that this division and side assignment should be random, rather than based on students' prior views on the issue.

5. Identify a student leader of each group. The leader is responsible for ensuring that their group is productive in preparing for the activity, and for naming which student from their group will be the next to speak.

6. Review the argumentative claims that have been so far discussed on both sides of the issue, particularly as part of the discussion of the articles that were read as preparation. Elicit a counter-argument from students to each of the arguments named. This argument and counter-argument review should be noted on the board or projector, allowing for subsequent reference by students.

7. Explain that this activity will hone and practice the ability to critique and respond to arguments, and to refute counter-arguments. Then model counter-argument and refutation of the counter-argument with the following example.

Debatable Issue: Is France's ban on wearing the naqib a form of religious intolerance?

Position: France's ban on wearing the naqib is oppressive to Islamic women.

Argument: Religious Muslim women in France are unable to work, hurting their families. According to the *Guardian* article (September 19, 2011), a Muslim woman, Hind Ahmas, has not looked for a job, even though she really needs one, because she cannot wear the naqib in public. Ms. Ahmas appears to be a typical Muslim woman, and her family is shown to be suffering hardships because she cannot work.



Counter-Argument: They say that the French ban on the naqib means that Muslim women are unable to work. But Muslim women like Hind Ahmas always have the option of removing their naqib while they are working. She shouldn't feel oppressed because she can wear the naqib at home.

Refutation: They say that Muslim women have the option of taking off the naqib in public. But Muslim women won't do this because they believe it violates their religion. The example of Ms. Ahmas is clear about that. So the French ban on the naqib in public still has the effect of preventing Muslim women from working, causing many Muslim families to be poor.

8. Give the sides some time to discuss and build at least five arguments and counter-arguments. The leader from each side should ensure that these arguments are written out. Argument builders are of course useful for this purpose.
9. Begin the Refutation Two-Chance activity.
 - A. Pick one of the sides to start.
 - B. That side should state one of its arguments. To do so, a student should stand and deliver her argument, and stay standing.
 - C. The other side should then make a counter-argument to respond to the argument. To do so, a student should stand and deliver his counter-argument, and stay standing.
 - D. Then the first side should try to refute the counter-argument. They will have two chances to do so, by two students. The first student should stand and deliver her refutation. If she doesn't effectively refute the counter-argument, she stays standing and a second student can try. If the second chance fails, the counter-argument side wins this round.
 - E. The instructor should adjudicate as well as manage the process. The first team should receive two points if the first student refutes the counter-argument, one point if the second student does. The counter-argument side gets a point if the two chances at refutation fail.



- F. Adjudication should be based on Argument-Centered Education criteria for refutation: responsiveness, comprehensiveness, depth of thinking, and strength of counter-argument. See the ACE assessment rubric for more detail on these terms.
 - G. Every student on a side should speak before any student speaks twice.
 - H. When delivering a counter-argument and refutation of a counter-argument, students should use the “refutation construct,” which means referring to the other side’s point (“The other side said”) before responding (“But we disagree. . . .”).
 - I. Arguments, counter-arguments, and refutation should not be repetitive. Each contribution should contain something not spoken entirely already.
10. Keep score. The activity ends when both sides have run out of new arguments. Then analyze the “glow” and “grow” highlights from the activity.