Debate in the Classroom
Here is some information for teachers who would like to introduce debate in their grades 6 to 12 classrooms. Debate is any structured, respectful discussion in which two sides of an issue are compared and questioned. This makes debate is highly flexible - speaking times, format and individual duties can be varied to suit the needs of your class.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN TEACHING DEBATE:
1. The teacher does not have to hear and evaluate everything.
2. In any activity, each student must have a specific duty.
3. All events are timed.
4. At first, give insufficient time for the activities
5. Get a whistle or bell to signal the end of time.
6. Depending on circumstances, debates may work better if you use teams of 3, 4 or more students. Consider the maturity of your students, the time available and the class size.

WARM UPS #1 (One period)
Step #1 In partners, give students a word (blue, Christmas, happy). They must speak for 30 seconds, then switch.

Step #2 Give them a list of words. One partner starts and must talk about the first word for as long as possible without pausing or saying “um”. As soon as they pause, the partner starts on the next topic. Have them time each other.

Step #3 Give them a simple resolution (school is important, Christmas is fun) and each partner takes a side. The Affirmative one speaks for 30 seconds, then the Negative one speaks for 30 seconds.

Step #4 Have each pair choose sides, same as above, but his time they must listen to their partner and clash with as many points as possible. Its not quite a debate, just: 

Affirmative speech (1 min), Negative reply (30 sec)
Negative speech (1 min), Affirmative reply (30 sec)

WARM UPS #2 (1 period)
Step #1 **Create Interest in Debate.** Students will likely enjoy the challenging the adult authority figure, so try a simple class-against-the-teacher argument on a popular topic. Or deliver a terrible speech and have students critique it. Advantages: students take interest in the process of constructing arguments. The terrible speech also leads to making a list of the components public speaking.

Step #2 **Familiarize with Terms.** Make a record of what you need for a good speech if not already done. As include what is needed for a good argument as well (consistency, logic, proof, etc.). The SEDA Step-by-Step Guide (p.17-24) has this Information. List the key debate terms on the board (Guide, p.2) and have students record them.

Step #3 **Practice Speaking.** Give students an opportunity to speak in a non-threatening environment. Have students pair up and try the following exercise: Student A speaks on interesting topic (my parents are embarrassing, a really good/bad movie I saw) for 30 seconds after two minutes preparation. Student B prepares for a different topic
while A prepares. When A is speaking, B will record three strong points and three areas for improvement. B debriefs A. Then they switch and A records B. Since whole class is doing this with teacher timing, no one is on the spot. This exercise provides speaking, constructive criticism and opportunity for Analysis.

Step #4  
**Practice Flowcharting.** Explain the process of a flowchart (Guide, p.16). Give a brief speech and have students record your three main points and how they would argue with them. Then pair the students up and have student A prepare a speech. When A gives the speech, B will record the main points on a flowchart. They switch and when done compare the flowcharts to the speeches to see how accurate they were. Flowcharting encourages good use of prepared notes, close listening, good communication and public speaking.

Once the introduction is done, you can explain to the students they style of debate you will use. Here are three simple types:

1. **TWO PERSON SPEECHES**  
   Students choose or are given a topic to discuss. They can spend between 10 minutes and 4 days preparing (depending on what you want). Students take opposing sides and each person speaks twice as follows:
   
   - Affirmative speaks (2 min) → Negative (2 min)
   - Negative speaks (2 min) → Affirmative (2 min)

   Because so many students are speaking at once, teacher evaluation is primarily observation or anecdotal, although peer-making is easy to do.

2. **CLASSROOM DISCUSSION STYLE**  
   Divide class into two teams. A reluctant student can be the moderator. An explanation of discussion style principles is in p.25 of the SEDA Step-by-Step Guide and you will need to explain the discussion period to your students. Have all students do research for 1 to 5 days. After everyone has researched, a team of 13 can be divided as follows:
   
   - 1 team leader, responsible for keeping the team on task
   - 3 students preparing speeches (1st, 2nd, and rebuttal)
   - 4 students preparing questions to ask the other team
   - 1 student preparing a list of rules from the Guide and informing the team of the rules and watching for infractions
   - 4 students preparing arguments in anticipation of the other side’s points.

   Each sheet of paper has potential argument on it and an explanation of a Response.

   A team of 13 can also be divided as follows:
   
   - 3 students work on writing the 1st speech (1 of the 3 delivers it)
   - 3 students work on writing the 2nd speech (1 of the 3 delivers it)
   - 3 students work on writing the rebuttal/conclusion speech (1 of the 3 delivers it)
   - 3-4 students preparing question to ask the other team and anticipating replies to questions from the other side
The order for the debate is the same as in the SEDA Step-by-Step Guide, but the times vary. The 1st Affirmative speaker starts and speeches alternate between the teams, with each speech taking 3-5 minutes. This is followed by a 10 to 20 minute discussion period, were the teams are asking each other questions back and forth. All team members are free to participate in the discussion. There is a five minute break to consolidate arguments and then the concluding (rebuttal) speeches are given.

3. Another Classroom Debate Method

**Step #1** - Explain the idea of a resolution. Have the students develop them (one period).

**Step #2** - Once the resolutions are prepared, students divide into groups of six to study the implications and set the basis for the research. Teacher should provide a template or general guide for the students to use.

**Template suggestion:**

Probably the students will be familiar with some sort of KWL procedure:

- **K** - First, the students record what they already Know about a topic.
- **W** - Next, students record what they Want (or need) to know about it.
- **L** - Finally, after their research, students record what they have Learned about a topic - usually on a grid form.

Research tools should be student centred, but other simple and general patterns are PMI (plus, minus, & interesting) and the classic W5. Active learning needs to involve the students at all stages -- including the guiding of their own research.

**Step #3** - Once each group has researched their issue (at least two periods), the group will be divided into two teams of three people. The teams draw for affirmative/negative and then spend time preparing their arguments. It is a good idea to ask at least three students and probably five to act as judges.

**Step #4** - Instructor will then take time to explain the roles of each of the debaters--and the debates begin. Discussion or Cross-examination style work best. Some teachers have debaters clashing only in their speeches -- and a large number of the audience or class act as questioners -- distributing questions between the two sides. The remaining groups take their turn -- if time is controlled carefully all the groups of six can finish debating in 2 periods.

**Advanced Units**

More detailed units that instruct in more depth can be found in the “Step-by-Step” Guide to debate and in the “Debate Information Package for Teachers”. More information here is available from SEDA.