

Debate: Should we celebrate Columbus Day?

This activity is designed to have students use the information they've learned throughout the unit to debate the idea of celebrating Columbus by observing Columbus Day. Below are two documents created for use with this activity. For this activity, the class is divided into three groups: In favor of observing Columbus Day; Against observing Columbus Day; Judges. The timeframe for completing this activity is up to the teacher—largely dependent upon the age group and the teacher's expectations for the level of information produced by each group. It could be a one day activity, or stretched out into multiple days for a more in-depth activity.

This activity can also be expanded, especially for older students, by including a final writing assignment. After the debate has been completed, students must pick a side of the debate and write a persuasive essay supporting the side they chose and critiquing the opposing view. Depending upon the age level, students can be required to cite primary or secondary sources to support their argument.

When it is time to actually conduct the debate, the structure below can be followed. You may need to adjust it—making it shorter, longer, adding rounds, etc. to make it work for your own class. A coin toss can be used to decide who goes first. Remind students that there is no talking during the other group's turn—they cannot respond to that group's comments until it is their turn.

Round One: Introduction to argument

Each group gets 5 minutes to introduce their main points.

Round Two: Response

Each group gets 4 minutes to respond to their opponents' claims and add any relevant information to their argument.

Round Three: Response

Each group gets 3 minutes to respond to their opponents' claims and add any relevant information to their argument.

Round Four: Closing Remarks

Each group gets 5 minutes to make any final arguments and closing remarks to the judges.

Topic of Debate

Do you think that we should celebrate Christopher Columbus' exploration by designating a day to remember and honor him?

Group 1: This group will argue that Christopher Columbus should be celebrated and remembered annually on Columbus Day.

Group 2: This group will argue that Christopher Columbus should NOT be celebrated and remembered annually on Columbus Day.

Group 3: This group will be the judges of the debate. This group must judge who wins the debate and determine what the criteria of success will be—What will each group be judged on? How will they earn points? This group must put together a rubric to score each group. The teacher will help you.

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