

How to Structure Civic Discourse with Thinkalong

Thinkalong discussions are designed to help students engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. Students can practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their students. To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your students. Follow these steps to host a Thinkalong discussion with your students.

Take a Poll - 5 minutes

Take a poll of where your students stand on the Thinkalong question — pro or con. Ask them to record their response and reasoning before the debate begins. What information in the sample pieces of news media influenced their position? What credible factual evidence can they reference? The Thinkalong debate worksheets will be helpful for this.

Create Pro and Con Teams - 5 minutes

Split your classroom into 2 teams – the Pros and the Cons. Try to have an even number on both teams. Don't worry if some students want to be on a different team than the one to which they are assigned – Thinkalong debates are about practicing the ability to see multiple perspectives. Ask each team to discuss their responses to the debate question among their teammates and make notes of the evidence they will use to support their statements.

Make a Claim - 3 minutes each

Ask a representative from both teams to present their opening statements. This is an initial response to the debate question and should include at least 3 claims for their side of the issue supported by evidence from the resources in the Thinkalong module.

Ask Questions - 3 minutes each

After both sides present their statements, open the discussion up for questions from each other but avoid allowing responses now. Some students may ask for clarifications on specific claims or a citation for a source, while other questions may be much broader. Both are valid and add value to the discussion.

Discuss the Claims - 5 minutes each

Reassemble your Pros and Cons teams and have them discuss the claims they heard from their classmates. Ask them to create evidence-based responses to the other team's arguments and incorporate any new information gained from the questions. Students may need extra time to reference other pieces of evidence from the Thinkalong module.

Present a Response - 3 minutes each

Now it's time for rebuttals. Here students will take the findings from their team discussion to present their response to the rest of their classmates. Ask a representative to present the new response and summarize their position on the debate question.

Estimated Time: 3 minutes

Take Another Poll - 5 minutes

After the debate is finished, ask your students to go back to their original response. Did their opinion change after the discussion? Did they learn anything new? Are there more ideas they might like to explore?