

THE DEBATE



Introduction

This lesson ideally builds on the first lesson, Our Precious Liberties, but can be a standalone lesson if needed. It looks at the process of a parliamentary debate and how MPs are accountable for their votes by being on record during 'the division' – this is reflected in the lesson, where students enact the 'Aye' and 'No' lobbies at the end of their debate. Students get the chance to use statistics from The Vegan Society to prepare their position and then take part in a formal debate, considering the motion 'veganism should be actively promoted by the UK government'.

N.b. Although this lesson has been prepared as a Citizenship lesson, it could be adapted to be a part of a KS3 English lesson too. There are useful links to literacy skills such as:

[How to debate - \(BBC Bitesize\)](#)

[Debating resource pack \(Parliamentary Learning\)](#)

LESSON OVERVIEW

Timing

60 minutes

Setting

classroom,
hall

Curriculum links

Citizenship – the development of the political system of democratic government in the United Kingdom and the operation of Parliament, including voting.

English – spoken English: participating in formal debates and structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said.

What you'll need

Slide deck – The Debate; Worksheet – The Debate; Help Sheet – The Debate.

Additional resources

Student exercise books, pens, timer, conch (visual representation of 'Speaker' depending on the class).

Before the lesson

Open slide deck – The Debate; load BBC Bitesize debate video; print Help Sheet (1 per pair), debate Worksheet (1 per student); consider the room layout for a formal debate; consider how you will split the class into proposition and opposition and whether the chairperson will be you or a student; there is also the chance for student 'judges' – you may want them seated in different spots than usual.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the process of parliamentary debate in the UK.
2. To argue for and against a motion using evidence.



THE LESSON

Timings are a guide – adjust to suit your class.

Starter - [5 mins]

Slide 2

The activity

- Students will read the summaries of the two letters (give a minute or two to consider).
- They choose a position before a fictional press conference and write one sentence referencing their position.

Potential script

- Before we do anything else today: you are the newly appointed Minister for Food Policy. Two letters arrived this weekend. Read them, choose your position, and write one sentence you'd say at this morning's press conference.
- Keep that sentence in mind – by the end of this lesson, you'll vote on whether you still stand by it.

Slide 3

The activity

- Introduce the learning objectives and key words.

Potential script

- In Parliament, a motion is a formal proposal put to the House for a vote. MPs debate the motion before dividing, i.e. voting. The wording matters: 'This house believes that...'
- A rebuttal is a direct response to a specific argument made by the other side. It is not simply repeating your own argument; it requires active listening. A good rebuttal identifies the weakness in the opposition's claim and provides counter-evidence.

Task - / do - [15 mins]

Slide 4

The activity

- Introduce the motion for today's lesson.

Potential script

- This is today's motion: 'Veganism should be actively promoted by the UK government.' What does the word

'actively' mean? Does it make it stronger or weaker as a statement?

- Both sides can agree that veganism exists. The debate is about whether it is the government's role to push it. That's a question about liberty, and about what governments are for.
- Today you may not agree with the position you are going to argue for; it is not about your personal opinion, but how debates work. There are many MPs who do not always personally agree with their party, but they are required to argue that position due to the party whip.

Key knowledge

- 'Actively promoted' could include government advertising campaigns, subsidies for plant-based food, changes to school meal standards, tax incentives, or labelling requirements.
- The opposition's strongest ground is not 'veganism is bad', but 'it is not the government's place to dictate diet' – this is a liberty argument, not a veganism argument. Help students understand that distinction.
- Party whips are MPs or Peers appointed by political parties in the UK Parliament to ensure their colleagues attend and vote according to the party line.

Slide 5

Resources: BBC Bitesize clip (link on the slide).

The activity

- Show the BBC Bitesize clip 'How to discuss and debate'.
- Pupils actively listen for the dos and don'ts suggested.
- After the clip, take 4-5 responses. Expect answers such as: listen carefully, don't interrupt, use evidence, be respectful, don't make it personal.

Potential script

- Before playing: Watch for the specific dos and don'ts they mention. You'll need them for when we debate.

Slide 6

Resource: Worksheet - The Debate.

The activity

- Pupils read the steps of a parliamentary debate and order them 1-8. This can be done alone or in pairs.
- They are then revealed as a class for students to self-mark.



Potential script

- Before we run our own debate, let's look at how it works in the real Parliament. Here are 8 steps— in pairs, order them 1 to 8 in your exercise books. You have 2 minutes.

Correct order

1. Order, order— the Speaker calls the House to order.
2. The motion is introduced— its significance is explained.
3. The Speaker announces the question formally.
4. The member opposing speaks first— this mirrors your opposition opening statement.
5. Other speakers contribute— equal balance of for and against.
6. Closing statements from each side.
7. The Speaker announces the question again and the division takes place.
8. The result is announced.

Key knowledge

- In the House of Commons, the Speaker is an elected MP who is politically neutral once in the role. They call on MPs to speak, maintain order, and announce the result of divisions.
- The division is the physical vote— MPs walk through the 'Aye' lobby or the No lobby and are counted by tellers. This is exactly what students will do in the plenary.

Slide 7

The activity

- This slide shows the specific running order that will be followed in the classroom debate. Students need to know what to expect before they plan.

Potential script

- This is the order we will follow. It mirrors the parliamentary process you've just seen, adapted for our classroom.
- Floor contributions are for anyone: proposition, opposition or observers. You must add something new, not repeat what's been said.

Identify the chair now if you are using a student chair. Brief them on their role: introduce the motion, call on speakers, keep time, stay neutral.

Task - we do - [15 mins]

Resources: Help Sheet - The Debate.

Slide 8

The activity

- Six Vegan Society statistics are on the screen (these are also on the Help Sheet which can be shared as a pair).
- Students work in pairs to decide how each statistic could be used by both sides of the debate.
- The key instruction is: both sides can use this data. Your job is to decide what it proves.

Potential script

- These are all genuine statistics from The Vegan Society website. Before you plan your argument, I want you to think about what each one actually proves and whether your opponent could use it too.
- If further scaffolding is needed: for example, the 57% greenhouse gas figure. The proposition says it proves government action is urgent. The opposition can say it proves individual dietary choice is already changing without government interference.

Slide 9

The activity

- Ensure students are clearly split by this point.
- Students work in pairs within their proposition or opposition group/pair to plan one strong argument and one anticipated counter-argument with a rebuttal ready, using the PEEL structure (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link back to the motion) and the sentence starters on the Help Sheet.

Potential script

- You have 10 minutes to plan. Use PEEL; every claim needs a piece of evidence from the data we just looked at. 'I think' alone is not enough.
- Also prepare for the rebuttal. What is the strongest argument the other side will make? How will you respond to it?
- Ask pairs: Which statistic are you using? What does it prove exactly?

Differentiation

- Ensure all students have access to the Help Sheet.



- Those who need support could focus on the point and evidence sentences only.
- Anyone who needs stretching could consider the weakest point from their own side and prepare a defence for it.

Slide 10

The activity

- These are the sentence starters. They can be left on the screen if you prefer not to print it out.
- Draw students' attention to the rebuttal starters before the debate begins— these are the ones most pupils forget under pressure.

Differentiation

- For those that need further challenge: while students are working, inform the student judges of their role and inform them of their task (active listening, noting specific moments like a statistic used, a rebuttal that landed well or a claim that doesn't have evidence). Consider assigning one judge to each side of the debate and potentially a third to evaluate the floor contributions.

Task - you do - [15 mins]

Slide 11

The activity

- Read through the rules of the debate.
- Draw attention to rule 5: floor speakers must add something new.
- If using a student chair, remind them of rule 6 and encourage them to use it when required.

Potential script

- **Let us go through the rules of our debate.**
- **Speak through the chair.** All contributions are addressed to the chairperson, not directly at the opposing side
- **One speaker at a time.** When someone is speaking, everyone else listens. No interrupting, calling out, or groaning.
- **Evidence over opinion.** Every claim must be supported by a fact, statistic, legal case or named perspective. 'I think' alone is not enough.
- **Challenge the argument, not the person.** You

can disagree with what someone said. You may not comment on who they are or how they said it.

- **Floor speakers: add, don't repeat.** If you contribute from the floor, you must bring something new: a new piece of evidence, a new angle, or a direct rebuttal.
- **The chair has final say.** If the chair asks you to stop or move on, you stop. No exceptions.

Your role, as teacher

- Your primary role during the debate is timekeeper and rule enforcer, not commentator. Resist the urge to fill silences with your own views.
- If a speaker stalls, prompt with 'What evidence are you using for that point?'
- If a floor contribution repeats a point: 'That's been made - can you add something new or challenge a specific argument?'
- If the debate becomes heated, calmly invoke rule 4: 'We're challenging the argument, not the person. What is the specific claim you want to respond to?'
- Do not indicate which side is winning during the debate. Save all evaluation for the judge students and the plenary.

Slide 12

The activity

- The structured debate runs in the order on the screen.
- If using judge students, they have their three specific tasks to note during the debate.

Debate timings

- **Step 1** - Chair opens: 'Order, order. The motion before the house is: veganism should be actively promoted by the UK government. I call upon the opposition to make their opening statement.' 30 seconds.
- **Step 2** - Opening statement, opposition: 90 seconds.
- **Step 3** - Opening statement, proposition: 90 seconds.
- **Step 4** - Rebuttal, opposition: 1 minute.
- **Step 5** - Rebuttal, proposition: 1 minute.
- **Step 6** - Floor contributions: 3-4 pupils, 1 minute each (depending on time).



- **Step 7** - Closing summary, opposition: 30 seconds.
- **Step 8** - Closing summary, proposition: 30 seconds.

Look out for

- Students who argue well for a side they personally disagree with— acknowledge this, it is a great democratic skill.
- Those who refer to the word 'actively' from the motion; understanding this nuance is tricky.
- If you have previously taught *Our Precious Liberties* lesson and a student refers to any of the subject knowledge or independent research.

Plenary - [10 mins]

Slide 13

The activity

- This is a moment of calm to collect thoughts. 60 seconds of individual thinking.
- Students decide their personal view, not their debate position.

Potential script

- Put your debate role down. For 60 seconds, think about what you personally believe, not what you argued. Has anything in the debate, or in the data, changed your mind?
- Remember your starter press conference sentence. Are you still standing by it?

Slide 14

The activity

- The parliamentary division: students physically walk to the "Aye" side or the 'No' side of the room to vote on the motion, mirroring exactly what MPs do in the division lobbies.
- Two students count each side. The chair announces the result formally.
- Closing points/debrief.

Potential script

- In Parliament, when a debate ends, MPs don't just raise their hands— they vote with their feet. They walk through the 'Aye' lobby or the 'No' lobby and are counted. That's called a division. We're going to do exactly that now.
- When I say 'divide', stand up and walk to your side. 'Aye'— you agree veganism should be actively promoted. 'No'— you disagree. You do not have to vote the way you argued during the debate.
- Students count and then get the chair announces: 'The 'Ayes' to the right, [number]. The 'Noes' to the left, [number]. The ['Ayes'/'Noes'] have it.

Questions to ask during the debrief

- Did anyone walk to a different side from the one they argued for? Would anyone be willing to share what changed?
- What does it tell us that an MP might argue for a position they personally disagree with?
- Return to the opening poll from the starter: At the start you chose a position as Minister for Food Policy. Has that changed? Who would write a different press conference sentence now?

Key knowledge

- Parliamentary divisions have taken place since the 13th century. The physical separation into 'Aye' and 'No' lobbies means votes cannot be anonymous— MPs are on record. This accountability is central to parliamentary democracy.
- A free vote — where MPs are not whipped by their party — is the closest parliamentary equivalent to what students have just done: personal conscience over assigned position.

