



Philosophical Chairs



Performance Objective



Students will develop inquiry, oral language, and argumentation skills through participation in an informed debate on a controversial issue, while considering various points of view.

What Is Philosophical Chairs?

- A structured form of academic discourse
- A discussion and informed debate, which relies on a prompt as the foundation
- An opportunity for students to improve verbal capability and fluency, as well as academic language skills

Philosophical Chairs: Central Statement

- Prompt must be engaging, easily understood, and clearly divided into two sides.
- Encourages students to debate the merits of the content behind the statement or question.

“Pesticides should be outlawed for food crops.”

“The United States should withdraw from the United Nations.”

“Social media does more harm than good.”

Philosophical Chairs: Choosing a Side

- Brainstorm as many arguments as possible FOR and AGAINST.
- Summarize current personal position.
- If using a text, select quotes, paragraph numbers, or page numbers that support the position.

Central Statement:	
Agree	Disagree
Summarize your current position on the central statement above.	

Philosophical Chairs: Rules of Engagement

Rules of Engagement for Philosophical Chairs

- Maintain your understanding of the prompt or central statement throughout the activity.
- Actively listen to the person who is speaking.
- Wait for the teacher or facilitator to recognize you before you speak; only one person speaks at a time.
- Seek to understand the opposing speaker's point of view, even if you do not agree with him/her.
- Briefly summarize the previous speaker's argument before you make your response.
- Contribute your own thoughts, offering your reasons as succinctly as possible.
- Respond to statements and ideas only, not to the person giving them.
- Change your mind about the central statement as new information or reasoning is presented.
- Refrain from having side conversations during the debate portion of the activity.
- Move to the opposite side or to the undecided position if your thinking grows and changes as a result of convincing arguments from the opposing side.
- Support the discussion by maintaining order and contributing constructive comments.

Keep the informed
debate productive,
academic, and
structured.



Philosophical Chairs: Format



One side of the classroom will be designated as the “Agree” side, while the other will be designated as the “Disagree” side.

Philosophical Chairs: Debrief and Reflection

Participant Reflective Checklist for Philosophical Chairs

Directions: Prior to the activity, review the statements below. Upon completion, check the boxes that best represent your Philosophical Chairs experience and summarize your reflection in the space provided.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No
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Did you...

- Maintain your understanding of the prompt or central statement throughout the activity?
- Actively listen to the person who spoke?
- Seek to understand the opposing side's perspective, even if you did not agree with him/her?
- Contribute your own thoughts, ideas, or questions, if possible?
- Take any notes to help track the discussion on both sides?
- Change your mind about the position presented?
- Refrain from having side conversations during the activity?
- Change your position if you thought convincing arguments from the other side were presented?

If you spoke, did you...

- Wait until the teacher/facilitator gave you the floor to speak?
- Briefly summarize the previous discussion?
- Address the ideas that your opponent presented?

Summarize your reflection by...

in which you can improve for next time.

Written Reflection for Philosophical Chairs

Directions: Provide a written reflection of the Philosophical Chairs discussion that you heard in class. Include as many of the following points as possible in your reflection.

- What central statement was discussed?
- What were the arguments for and against the statement?
- What was your position? What were your reasons for this position?
- What was the most frustrating part of today's discussion?
- What was the most memorable part of today's discussion?
- Which statements had the most effective logical appeal and emotional appeal? Why?
- What conclusions can you draw about how you form your beliefs based on today's discussion?
- What would you change about your participation in today's activity? Do you wish you had said something that you did not? Did you think about changing seats, but didn't? Explain.
- If you changed your mind during the discussion, explain why. What arguments persuaded you to do so? If you did not change your mind during the discussion, which arguments do you believe were the strongest counterpoints to the opposing statements? Why?

Make sure to debrief as a class and have students reflect on both the process and the content of the activity.



Questions or Comments?

