



# “Way to Go” Debaters!

Civics/Language Arts

## Overview

This is a project-based learning activity that is part of a larger unit, providing high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to take a stance, research and build an argument, then debate it publicly using an audience-friendly debate format, Public Forum. The debate question is: “Should a commuter rail system be built down the center of Main Street (insert your city’s major thoroughfare) to accommodate commuter needs?” Students may prefer to expand existing highways instead, particularly as they are of driving age and would be enticed by options that promote driving and carpooling. Students research and build their arguments relative to environment, personal freedom and safety, then present them to judges in Public Forum format.

## Time Allotment

Four 90-minute periods (including research)

## Learning Objectives

On completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- Display solid logic, lucid reasoning, and depth of analysis.
- Utilize evidence without being driven by it.
- Present a clash of ideas by countering/refuting arguments of the opposing team (rebuttal).
- Communicate ideas with clarity, organization, eloquence, and professional decorum.

*These objectives are pulled directly from [www.forensiconline.net](http://www.forensiconline.net)*

## Media Components

- Internet connected computer for each team (computer lab, classroom stations, mobile laptop lab, etc.)
- Websites for student preparation on the transportation question:

### Federal Agencies

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)  
[www.fhwa.dot.gov](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov)

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

[www.fta.dot.gov](http://www.fta.dot.gov)

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

[www.fra.dot.gov](http://www.fra.dot.gov)

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)

[www.dot.gov/new/index.htm](http://www.dot.gov/new/index.htm)

### Transportation Organizations

Amtrak - [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)

American Public Transportation Association (APTA) [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com)

American Association of State Highway & Transportation (AASHTO) [www.transportation.org](http://www.transportation.org)

Association of American Railroads (AAR) [www.aar.org/Homepage.aspx](http://www.aar.org/Homepage.aspx)

American Highway Users Alliance (AHUA) [www.highways.org](http://www.highways.org)

### State Agencies

Check online information for specific state agencies such as: Public Utility Commission; Department of Rail; Department of Commerce; Department of Transportation

- Websites for student research on the topic of rail safety: [www.oli.org](http://www.oli.org)
- Websites for teacher preparation:  
Teaching Debate: [www.teachingdebate.org](http://www.teachingdebate.org)  
National Forensic League [www.nflonline.org](http://www.nflonline.org)

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Forensics Online: [www.forensiconline.net](http://www.forensiconline.net)  
(On this site, the following article serves as a resource for teachers in developing the unit:  
[www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=180](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=180))

### Materials and Student Handouts

- Debate guidelines  
([www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=176](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=176))
- Flowcharts, one per debate for each student that is not debating  
([www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=182](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=182))
- Ballots, one per debate for each student that is not debating  
([www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=179](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=179))

### Teacher Preparations

- Predetermine student partners or teams based on practice debate experiences.
- Research current events that might work well as a launching pad during the Introductory Activity.
- Become familiar with the judging rules for Public Forum debate and prepare to serve as the facilitator for the debates in your classroom.  
[www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=177](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?action=jump&catid=28&id=177)
- Prepare students adequately for this project by giving them opportunities for public speaking experience, as well as taking them through the steps described in the article, “Public Forum in the Classroom: A Bridge from Traditional Public Speaking to Debate,” by Adam J. Jacobi. (See last link under Media Components.)
- Invite an Operation Lifesaver presenter to the classroom to introduce the topic for the debates and provide background information first-hand. (See State Coordinator section of [www.oli.org](http://www.oli.org))

### Introductory Activity

**Focus:** If it is possible to get an Operation Lifesaver (OL) presenter, introduce the presenter and have him/her provide some background information and introduce the debate question. As students are

already in “debate mode,” they should respond quickly to a discussion relative to a new topic. Write the question for debate on the board: “Should a commuter rail system be built down the center of xx Street (insert your city’s major thoroughfare) to accommodate commuter needs?”

If possible, use a current news article relative to the subject at hand. For example, if your city is in the process of building a new football stadium, the suggestion of transportation and accessibility to all members of the community might then lead to a discussion of the best method of transportation for the masses. Or more directly, perhaps your town is in the process of widening a major highway corridor and the alternative of putting a passenger rail service down the middle of it could be explored.

**Activity:** Conduct a Think-Pair-Share in which partners first write down everything they can think of on their own relative to the debate question, then work with their partner to expand their list, and then share what they have brainstormed. If necessary, pose probing questions: What would have to be considered in terms of taxpayer dollars? Personal freedom? Safety for all citizens? Environmental concerns? Traffic congestion?

**Follow-up:** Students share with the whole class what they have brainstormed relative to the question, and a class list is generated for posting (either on the chalk/whiteboard or chart paper). Once students have a general idea of directions they might go in their research, inform them of the transportation policy and safety resources that might also help them as they develop their arguments.

### Learning Activity

**Focus:** Provide a recap of the debate format and allow students time to get used to working with their teams or partners, to brainstorm arguments and to start the research process. Remind them that a bibliography of sources will be required as a means of accounting for their use of time.

**Activity:** Students may spend about three to four hours in preparation and research, some of which can be conducted at home (though this may not be possible for everyone). Using class time for this

purpose allows you to guide students and to refocus them, as needed.

Students who finish their case construction early may work on their constructive arguments aloud in front of their opposing team members (who are also done with case construction). This will give both sides a chance to hear opposing arguments and prepare even better rebuttal.

**Follow-up:** Tell students that everyone must be ready to debate on the starting day, and those who are not present will hinder their partner/team immensely. Use suggestions from the article by Jacobi (referenced in Teacher Preparations section).

## Culminating Activities

**Focus:** Provide flowcharts and ballot forms to all students. Students who are not presenting must flow the debate and complete a ballot. Use the coin toss method to determine which two teams will be up first. As suggested in “A Guide to Public Forum Debate” (NFL), the winning team decides either: if they will argue pro or con, or what the speaker order will be (begin the debate or give the last speech).

**Activity:** Students present their debates in Public Forum format. The speeches commence (possibly with con side arguing first) and follow this order and time specifications:

- Speaker 1 (Team A, 1st speaker) - 4 min.
- Speaker 2 (Team B, 1st speaker) - 4 min.
- Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2) - 3 min.
- Speaker 3 (Team A, 2nd speaker) - 4 min.
- Speaker 4 (Team B, 2nd speaker) - 4 min.
- Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4) - 3 min.
- Speaker 1 Summary - 2 min.
- Speaker 2 Summary - 2 min.
- Grand Crossfire (all speakers) - 3 min.
- Speaker 3 Final Focus - 1 min.
- Speaker 4 Final Focus - 1 min.

Each team may use up to two minutes of prep time.

**Follow-up:** After each debate, debrief the points raised and discuss other directions in which the debate could have gone. For fun, also tally up the ballots and announce who “won,” just before class ends.

## Assessment

Use a debate rubric, many examples of which are available through [www.teachingdebate.org](http://www.teachingdebate.org). One such example is included with this lesson.

## Community Connections

If the resolution is pertinent to current events in your town, the winning team might be able to present its viewpoints at a local county board meeting or write an editorial using their debate research, to send to the local paper. If the resolution is hypothetical, then arrange for presentation of the debate to the leadership of the local transit agency.

## Cross-Curricular Extensions

- **Social Studies:** Debate is often overlooked as an alternative to oral presentations in class. Use the Public Forum Debate format (or Lincoln-Douglas Debate format) for the discussion of topics in Social Studies, English or Science classes.
- **Writing/Journalism:** Incorporate the writing process in the development of an op-ed article for posting in a hypothetical (or actual) newspaper.

## National Standards

This lesson addresses National Standards (Level IV - grades 9-12)

### Language Arts

**Standard 4.** Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

**Standard 7.** Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

**Standard 8.** Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

### Civics

**Standard 25.** Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights.

**Standard 26.** Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the

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relationships among personal, political, and economic rights.

**Standard 28.** Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.

Source: [mcrel.org](http://mcrel.org)

### Adaptations

Adapt the Lincoln-Douglas Format for Classroom or Small Group Use, using resources and suggestions available at:

[www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?catid=29](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?catid=29)

### Debate Scoring Rubric

#### Arguments

- 4 - Superior: Arguments were eloquent, complex, elaborated, and supported with evidence and examples.
- 3 - Proficient: Arguments were complex, elaborated, and supported with evidence and examples
- 2 - Essential: Arguments were supported with evidence and examples.
- 1 - Unsatisfactory: Arguments lacked evidence and support.

#### Rebuttal

- 4 - Superior: Rebuttal directly addressed each of the opponents' arguments with counter-evidence.
- 3 - Proficient: Rebuttal directly addressed most of opponents' arguments with counter-evidence.
- 2 - Essential: Rebuttal directly addressed some of opponents' arguments with counter-evidence.
- 1 - Unsatisfactory: Rebuttal did not directly address opponents' arguments and/or did not present counter-evidence.

#### Teamwork

- 4 - Superior: Each member of the team presented an argument that built on the arguments of those that came earlier.
- 3 - Proficient: Each member of the team presented different but complementary arguments.
- 2 - Essential: Each member of the team presented a different argument, with minimal overlap and repetition.
- 1 - Unsatisfactory: Arguments were overlapping, repetitive, or contradictory.

Source: [www.forensiconline.net/forum/local\\_links.php?catid=29](http://www.forensiconline.net/forum/local_links.php?catid=29) (Lincoln-Douglas Assignments and Syllabus)

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