

INSTRUCTIONAL TASK 22

TASK 22 STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY

Students often believe that every issue or historical topic can be argued in a pro/con format, and that the goal of classroom discussion, rather than to understand your opponent, is to defeat him. This task offers an alternative to debate by providing a structure and focus for classroom discussions and allow for synthesis of information rather than ‘winning’ the debate. Students work in pairs and four-person teams to explore a question by reading multiple texts, present the contrasting positions, engage in discussion and reach consensus. Depending on the depth of the question, the number of documents and student familiarity with the task a Structured Academic Controversy can vary in length from part of a class period to multiple class periods.

Steps Outlined:

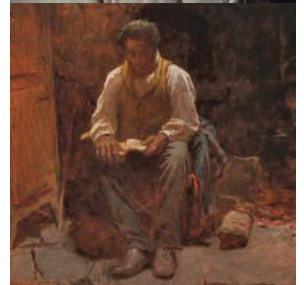
1. Choose a historical question that lends itself to contrasting viewpoints and arguable answers.
Examples:
 - a. “Was dropping the atomic bomb necessary to defeat the Japanese?”
 - b. “Could the Constitution have been ratified if slavery had been abolished?”
2. Select texts representing a variety of view points for students to examine.
3. Organize students into pairs.
4. Each pair takes a position about the historical question and reviews the texts. An organizer, included below, can help students track their analysis and prepare their positions.
Note: The positions can be assigned by the teacher, teacher directed through the selected text given to each pair, or can be determined by dyads independently.
5. Student pairs with opposing views then come together as four-person teams and present their views to one other with one pair presenting while the others listener
6. Once the first pair has presented, the listening pair repeats back what they understood; they do not argue or debate but can ask clarifying questions and solicit responses. Listeners do not become presenters until the original presenters are fully satisfied that they have been heard and understood.
7. After both pairs have presented and listened, the group of four abandon their original positions and work toward reaching consensus. If consensus proves unattainable, the team clarifies where their differences lie.
8. Students then independently write an argumentative essay based on the question.

Variations:

- Students research the question without provided text or with minimal provided text; defending their text selections as well as their positions
- The historical question is one that is student generated based on prior classroom discussions
- Groups can consider a variety of questions, with each group addressing one and the whole class listening to the consensus
- Historical questions can be replaced with questions about validity of sources or writing style

Source:

National History Education Clearhouse. “Structured Academic Controversy (SAC).” Accessed April 19, 2013.
[http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/themes/rwproject/resources/howtos_and_guides/How%20to%20get%20Argument Protocols Up and Going in Reading Workshop.pdf](http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/themes/rwproject/resources/howtos_and_guides/How%20to%20get%20Argument%20Protocols%20Up%20and%20Going%20in%20Reading%20Workshop.pdf)
<http://www.lawanddemocracy.org/discussionsac.html>



INSTRUCTIONAL TASK 22 (continued)

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY OUTLINE

Historical Question:

SIDE A:

Position:

SIDE B:

Position:

1. Partners prepare:
 - a. Find evidence that supports your side of the argument.
 - b. Prepare your position statement.
2. Position Presentation:
 - a. Side A presents their position using supporting evidence from the texts.
 - b. Side B restates to Side A's satisfaction.
 - c. Side B presents their position using supporting evidence from the texts.
 - d. Side A restates to Side B's satisfaction.
3. Consensus-Building:
 - a. Abandon original roles.
 - b. Build consensus regarding the question using supporting evidence.
 - c. If consensus can't be reached, clarify where the difference lie considering the evidence in the texts.

Source: http://teachinghistory.org/system/files/SAC-Handouts_12.pdf

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY-TEXT ANALYSIS CHART

Historical Question:

SIDE A: Position:	SIDE B: Position:
Evidence 1:	Evidence 1:
Evidence 2:	Evidence 2:
Evidence 3:	Evidence 3:
Evidence 4:	Evidence 4:

Questions you have about the sources, evidence and ideas in the text or presentation:

Consensus: