

LONDON DEBATE CHALLENGE MOTION FACT FILES



Motion 1: This House Would prioritise teaching popular fiction rather than classic literature in English classes

Some background information

Set texts assigned for English classes in school provide one of the routes to encourage students to read books. At a time where young people have many varied media choices, when libraries are closing, and many young people have few books at home, these assigned works may be seen to take on even more importance. The books chosen are often considered examples of great literature, frequently old and esteemed. This has advantages: they are well written, display examples of powerful writing and literary techniques. They provide cultural capital and are often said to contain universal themes that are always relevant. They can come across as dry, out of date and inaccessible, however, through setting, language and themes.

Excitement for reading among young people recently has been driven by popular fiction, with series like Harry Potter, Twilight and The Hunger Games attracting huge audiences. While arguably not as well written these books have demonstrable ability to engage and excite their readers. Might it be better to prioritise engagement and enthusiasm over ‘literary value’? Or should we maybe focus on making the classics interesting?

Useful facts

- The ‘Harry Potter’ series has sold around 500 million copies worldwide, the ‘Diary of a Wimpy Kid’ books nearly 200 million and ‘Twilight’ 120 million.
- ‘Don Quixote’ alone has sold around 500 million copies, ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ 200 million.
- One recent study estimated more than 75% of 12-14 year olds read one book or fewer per month.
- GCSE English requires study of one work by Shakespeare and one novel from the 19th century.

Activities for the class or club

It is important in debating to make arguments that are not only well-explained but also comparative to the other side. These exercises will help explore this topic and also develop comparative analysis skills.

Accessible to young readers

Appealing to young readers





Demonstrating good literature/language skills

Plot depth/depth of themes

Relatable characters?

Conversely to above, expose to new perspectives?

1. Students should be in groups of five or six. Each group is given one of the above reasons why we might choose a certain book for study in English classes. Each student must think of a book that they feel demonstrates their given reason well.

Give the class a few minutes to prepare short speeches to describe their book, and then why their book demonstrates the given reason. Students should then deliver these short speeches to their group.

After the speeches groups should have a short discussion about them and their chosen books, and what elements of their books are particularly important to the group's given reason.

2. Next you should reorganise the groups so that the newly formed groups have one person representing each of the above reasons. Again, give them a few minutes to prepare a short speech, this time explaining why their given reason is the most important one in considering what books should be chosen in English classes.

3. From here students can discuss the given motion, “This House Would prioritise teaching popular fiction rather than classic literature in English classes” either in groups or as a class.

Questions for students to ask themselves

Are there books you've read in school that have engaged you, or that you've struggled to enjoy? What made them interesting or not?

Think of your favourite books. Do you think you would enjoy them as much if you were forced to read them for class?

How much do you think it matters if people aren't reading as many books? What else might they be doing with their time?

Some further resources

theconversation.com/teenagers-arent-reading-enough-tough-books-heres-why-that-matters-91932

educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice104.shtml

bbc.co.uk/news/education-22540408





Parks

Libraries

Rubbish collection & waste management

2. Using the same list of local council responsibilities, ask students to rank them by how much adult life experience and knowledge they think are needed to have a valid opinion about it.

3. Ask students to compare their two lists. Discuss in their groups whether their lists match up or not, and why. Do they think younger people should be given a vote in local elections?

Questions for students to ask themselves

Think about all of the 14 year-olds you know. Could they make good decisions? What characteristics might help or hinder them?

What about adults? Will all of them make good, well-reasoned decisions?

Why is it important to have a say about things that effect you? What does it feel like to have no input into decisions?

Some further resources

theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/18/how-solve-youth-voting-crisis-voter-registration-election

independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-voting-age-16-right-to-vote-engaged-politics-general-election-2017-a7736091.html

local.gov.uk

