ESU
DEBATE-ABLE
TEACHING
RESOURCES

LESSON ONE

Objectives

Students have an enjoyable first experience of debating
Students give reasons for their opinions, using the prompt "Why? Because…"

Introduction – Cross the circle if… (5 mins)

Arrange the students sitting on chairs in a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle. You will make a statement starting "cross the circle if…", and anyone to whom it applies has to stand up and find another chair. E.g., "Cross the circle if you have brown hair" – everyone with brown hair stands and finds another seat. You will sit down. One student will not have a chair -they lead the next round by giving a statement of their own. Encourage a mix of statements about personal preferences (e.g. "…if you like pizza") and things that are verifiable (e.g. "…if you are wearing trainers") to encourage participation.

Main Activity (25 mins)

Chose a volunteer to help model the activity. You and your volunteer should both select a character to become.
[Volunteer's character and your character] are in a hot air balloon, flying over dangerous shark-infested waters. The balloon starts running out of air and is beginning to sink. In order to survive, we must throw one person overboard. Who should it be?
Discuss who should be saved, ensuring the pupils give a clear reason for their opinion that you can break down into a point (headline) and explanation. Use the prompt "Why? Because…" to stimulate responses.

Separate the class into groups of 4-5. Arrange some chairs at the front of the room to represent the hot air balloon. Ask each group to nominate a representative who will go in the balloon. Each representative will take on a character. They could be assigned a character by the teacher, or develop one themselves. See Hints & Tips for suggestions.
Allow the groups 5-10 minutes to prepare the reasons why their representative should stay in the balloon. Each group should develop 2 or 3 reasons.
Each group representative will take their place in the 'balloon' and take it in turns to present their reasons. Then allow the audience members to evaluate the reasons and vote on who should be thrown out of the balloon. There is another round of presentations and another vote. You can have as many or as few rounds as you like.

Differentiation

Allow the pupils to work in mixed ability groups to promote peer support.

Extension activities:
Pupils can structure their reasons as a point and explanation – the point captures the essence of the reason like a short headline, which is then explained.
A extra round in the balloon debate may ask pupils to compare their character to another, explaining why theirs is better using clear criteria.

Hints and Tips

Suggested characters:
Political figures
Musicians
Fictional characters
Historical figures

Chosen characters do not need to have a common theme.