



Creating Class Guidelines for Civil Discourse

Duration: 1-2 hours

Overview: Develop classroom guidelines for civil discourse with your students.

Materials:

- Anchor charts/Giant sticky notes
- Markers
- Retro Report video resource: "[Civics Skills: How to Respectfully Disagree](#)"

Steps:

Before:

1. Identify state, local, and school guidelines for discourse & discussions, and fill in this [teacher activity](#).
2. Ask students to watch the Retro Report video, "[Civics Skills: How to Respectfully Disagree](#)" (or begin class with this video)
3. Write each of the "[Guidelines for a Civil Discussion](#)" (1-9), created by the U.S. Courts, on a piece of chart paper & divide around the room. And print the "State, Local, and School Standards and Guidelines for Discourse" chart and attach it to a separate piece of chart paper.

During:

1. Distribute copies of the student activity below to students as they enter the room.
2. Have students answer the warm-up questions independently & then share answers with the class.
3. Divide the class into ten groups and provide each group with one of the pieces of chart paper.
4. Tell students that they will engage in a silent discussion about the U.S. Court's nine suggested guidelines for civil discussion. Students will have two minutes at each station to read the guideline and write:
 - a. Their initial thoughts/questions about the guideline
 - b. How the guideline might apply to civil discourse in this class
 - c. What ideas they have for revising the guideline to better fit civil discourse in this class
5. Each group will rotate to each question station & may use their time at that station to build on what others have said by writing additional comments or adding a

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“check-mark” or an “X” next to a comment when they agree or disagree with what someone else has said.

After:

1. Once all of the groups have interacted with all of the guidelines, ask students to complete the exit ticket questions on the student activity below
2. During the next class period (if you do not have a block schedule), have each group return to their starting anchor chart and revise the guideline based on the class’ feedback.*
3. Ask each group to present the synthesized guideline to the class for final feedback.
4. Write the final guidelines on an anchor chart to be displayed all year for reference.

*If the class believes one of the guidelines doesn’t apply in this context, encourage the group to make their own guideline to add to the list.

Why this works: Mastering the art of civil discourse takes practice, and sometimes when practicing a skill, people make mistakes. Developing civil discourse guidelines as a class creates shared, democratically created boundaries that gives students ownership over those boundaries and a responsibility to uphold them.

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