

Take a Stand

Grade Level: 5-12
Time: Two 45 minute sessions

Objectives:

- Focus attention on current issues in the news.
- Form and defend an opinion.

Curricular Connections: Civics, Language Arts

Materials: Several copies of local and national newspapers.

Procedure:

- 1) Ask students to think of an issue at school or in the community that affects them personally, e.g. graffiti, dress codes, drugs, poverty, etc.. Write a list of these issues on the board.
- 2) Select one issue that seems to interest all students, and discuss it briefly. Encourage students to voice differences of opinion but remind them to remain respectful.
- 3) Ask students to now think more broadly by identifying controversial issues in the news such as war, world hunger, prisoners' rights, election issues, and so on.
- 4) Pick one topic that evokes the most debate and ask students to look for related articles in the newspaper and cut them out (you can alternately distribute copies of articles you have selected beforehand, preferably those that show all sides of the story). Assign the articles as class reading to be discussed the next day.
- 5) Begin the next day by asking students where they stand on the issue and why.
- 6) On the board, list arguments on both sides of the issue. Then draw an imaginary line on the floor, one end representing "for" and the other "against" the issue. Ask students to "take a stand," literally, on the line where they feel they belong. They can stand at either end or anywhere in between, depending on the strength of their beliefs. (In the unlikely event that all are on one side, play "devil's advocate" and stand on the other side.)
- 7) When everyone is standing, open the floor to debate. The goal is to have some people move, closer to one point of view. At the end, people can be standing anywhere but in the "undecided" middle position.

Reflection Assignment:

1. Students discuss and debate issues.
2. Students explain and defend in writing their views on the issue by writing an editorial based on what has been learned and discussed.

Assessment:

1. Editorials on selected issue.
2. Ability to defend opinions.

Source: Adapted from NIE Curriculum Guide