

Debate: Hold a debate with your class. Choose an issue that is important to you or your school. Or depending on your grade level, pick a topic. Kindergarteners could debate whether chocolate ice cream is better than vanilla, Second Graders could debate how often they should have PE class, older students could debate a current event like the War in Iraq or an historical event like slavery.

Before they debate, they should hold at least two conversations with two different people – someone who feels pretty close to the way they feel, someone who disagrees with them, and they could hold a conversation with someone who is on the same side of the issues but for different reasons. Let me use the ice cream example to explain what I mean.

All people who love chocolate ice cream and would NEVER eat vanilla come to the front of the room. All the people who love vanilla ice cream and would NEVER eat Chocolate come to the back of the room. Then have the people that love chocolate but would eat vanilla if it were all that was available line up next to the CHOCOLATE people and do the same for the vanilla. Then have people come up and get in the line that prefer chocolate but like vanilla too and do the same for the other end of the classroom. Then put them in one long line from the front of the room to the back.

Chocolate

Ccccccccc

Ccccccccv

Cccccccvv

Ccccccvvv

Cccccvwww

Cccccvwwwv

Ccccwwwvv

Cccwwwvvvv

Ccwwwvvvvv

Cwwwvvvvvv

Vvvvvvvvvvv

Vanilla

The children hold the first conversation with someone standing next to them.

For the second conversation, the teacher folds the line in half into a “v” so people who would only eat chocolate are talking to people who would only eat vanilla. Then if you divide a third time have them unfold and divide the line in half and have one half of the line walk in a straight line to be in front of the other line so that you have people who feel strongly talking to people who prefer one but would eat the other.

This will give the children three rich conversations that will enhance vocabulary on the topic and give them ideas on how to support and refute the thoughts of others. Have them do a writing prompt related to the issue – some people may have changed their position during the discussions. That is ok.