



**Smart School Councils**

# DEBATE PACK

Are you passionate about sharpening your critical thinking and speaking skills?

**SHOULD CITIZENS HAVE TO PASS A POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE TEST IN ORDER TO VOTE?**



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# How to Use this Debate Pack

Whether you have just a few minutes or a full lesson, this Debate Pack has got you covered. Check out the Certificates at the end too.

## How to find the debate video and send to teachers

1. Log in to the [Smart School Councils platform](#) using your school details.
2. Click on the blue Class Meeting tool button in the dashboard.
3. Click on 'Next Meeting' at the top of the page.
4. To get started, click on 'click here' to browse existing questions and options.
5. If the debate topic is part of this week's question, it will appear there. Otherwise, click 'Search All' and type in the debate topic you're looking for.

### Got five minutes?

Play the debate video straight through and dive right into the debate. No need to pause at the prompts. It's a quick, engaging way to get your students thinking.

### Got 10/15 minutes?

Pause at the prompts in the video to explore additional ideas your class might have. Use the additional points or Power Facts if you'd like.

### Want to extend to 30 minutes or a full lesson?

Check out the lesson plan and writing tasks below. There is also a full Fact Sheet with amazing further reading if your students want to go deeper on the topic.

## What do the icons in the pack mean?



This is what the presenter says on the video



This is a Power Fact to explain or prompt debate that's not in the video



This is an additional debate point you can use that's not in the video

# Introduction and Brain Gym Question

## Introduction

Welcome to the Big Debate Club! My name is Becky and today we are debating the question... Should citizens have to pass a political knowledge test in order to vote?



In July 2024, a significant shift occurred in UK politics as the Labour Party won a decisive victory, leading to a new government. Similarly, in the United States, elections are held every four years in November, offering the potential for substantial changes not only in the presidency but also in other branches of government. Given the profound impact that elections can have on who holds decision-making power, should there be a requirement for voters to demonstrate a certain level of knowledge about the voting process, the candidates, and the issues before they are allowed to vote? You decide.

So in this debate you can either argue that citizens should have to pass a political knowledge test to vote or that they shouldn't have to.

## Brain Gym Question

Before we get started, I have a question for you...

According to Raconteur, what percentage of the UK population felt they were knowledgeable about politics in 2017?

- a. 9%
- b. 29%
- c. 49%
- d. 69%

Which of the 4 potential answers will you choose? Pause the video, turn to your partner and tell them your answer.

A study found that **80% of people feel overwhelmed by the amount of information** they need to process daily, leading many to avoid the news or further details on the world's issues to reduce stress deliberately.



With the growth of 24/7 news and easily accessible information on social media, it makes sense people are overwhelmed - but is it better not to know? [Article.](#)

## **FOR: Citizens should have to pass a political knowledge test**

We're going to share reasons for both sides of the debate, then it's up to you to think of the rest!

### **The more people know, the less they can be manipulated**

You might be thinking that the more people know, the less they can be manipulated. Informed voters might be less susceptible to manipulation by misinformation, propaganda, or emotional appeals, which can sometimes skew election results in ways that do not reflect the true interests of the public.

### **Knowing more means holding leaders to account**

You could say that voters knowing more means an improvement in our leaders. Voting based on passing a test means the elected leaders are chosen based on a well-considered understanding of their policies and competence, so they must show their own knowledge and competence to succeed.

Can you think of another reason why citizens should pass a test to vote? 

### **Could prevent voting based on misinformation**

In an era of fake news and misinformation, a political knowledge test could ensure that voters are basing their decisions on accurate information. Studies have shown that politically informed voters are less likely to be influenced by false news stories, which can have a significant impact on election outcomes. [Source.](#)

### **It encourages political education**

Having a knowledge test might encourage people to learn more about politics, government systems, and current issues. Teaching political knowledge in schools and requiring a test for voters could promote a lifelong understanding of politics.

### **People can be stressed by decision fatigue**



Informed voters are 25% more likely to make consistent choices that align with their own policy preferences, according to a 2017 Pew Research study. When they have the knowledge they need, voters are less likely to fall for the dramatics of the media or political tactics but instead are more likely to vote with the party with the policies they most align with. [Article.](#)



## **AGAINST: Citizens should not have to pass a political knowledge test**

Now let's change positions and consider why you might argue that citizens should not have to pass a political knowledge test in order to vote.



### **Voting is a fundamental right**

You might argue that voting is a fundamental right and should stay as such. Imposing knowledge tests could stop the rights of certain groups of people, particularly those with less access to education creating inequality where only certain already empowered voices are heard.

### **How much knowledge and who decides which?**

Or you could ask how much knowledge would you need and who decides this? Deciding what is "enough" knowledge is changeable depending on who is in charge, this could lead to unfair criteria to pass the test that favour certain people over others.

Can you think of another reason why citizens shouldn't have to pass a test? 

### **Risk of bias in the test**

A political knowledge test could be biased depending on who creates it, favouring certain political viewpoints or issues over others. This could result in unfairness, as voters who support different political ideologies might find the test harder to pass. Ensuring the test is completely neutral would be difficult.



### **Having criteria has prevented specific communities from voting**

In the United States of America, they have had criteria or barriers to voting in the past which harmed certain specific groups of people from taking part in the electoral process. For instance, literacy tests were banned by the Voting Rights Act in 1965 because they were used to prevent African Americans from voting.

[Source.](#)



# FactSheet: Should citizens have to pass a political knowledge test in order to vote?



Here's six key facts - three on each side - if you'd like to go a little deeper.

## Citizens should have to pass a knowledge test to vote

### *Better Decision Making:*

A study found that politically knowledgeable voters are 25% more likely to make consistent voting choices that align with their policy preferences, compared to less informed voters. [Source.](#)

### *Impact of Misinformation on Elections:*

According to research, 50% of U.S. adults have encountered false or misleading information about politics on social media, which can influence how they vote. Supporters of a political knowledge test argue that requiring voters to have a basic understanding of political issues could reduce the impact of misinformation. [Source.](#)

### *Differences in Education:*

In 2020, a national survey revealed that only 51% of U.S. adults could name all three branches of government. Proponents of a political knowledge test argue that increasing civic knowledge would create a more informed electorate capable of making better voting decisions. [Source.](#)

## Citizens should not have to pass a knowledge test to vote

### *Barriers to Voting:*

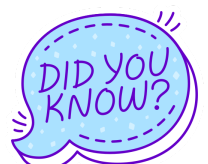
According to a 2022 report, over 60% of Americans oppose the idea of implementing voter knowledge tests because they believe it would unfairly target certain groups, particularly minorities and low-income individuals. This concern echoes the historical misuse of literacy tests, which were once used to stop African Americans voting. [Source.](#)

### *Disadvantages due to different education:*

A UNESCO study found that 750 million adults worldwide are illiterate, the majority living in developing countries. Introducing a political knowledge test in democracies with diverse populations could marginalise people who don't have access to good education. [Source.](#)

### *Historical voter suppression:*

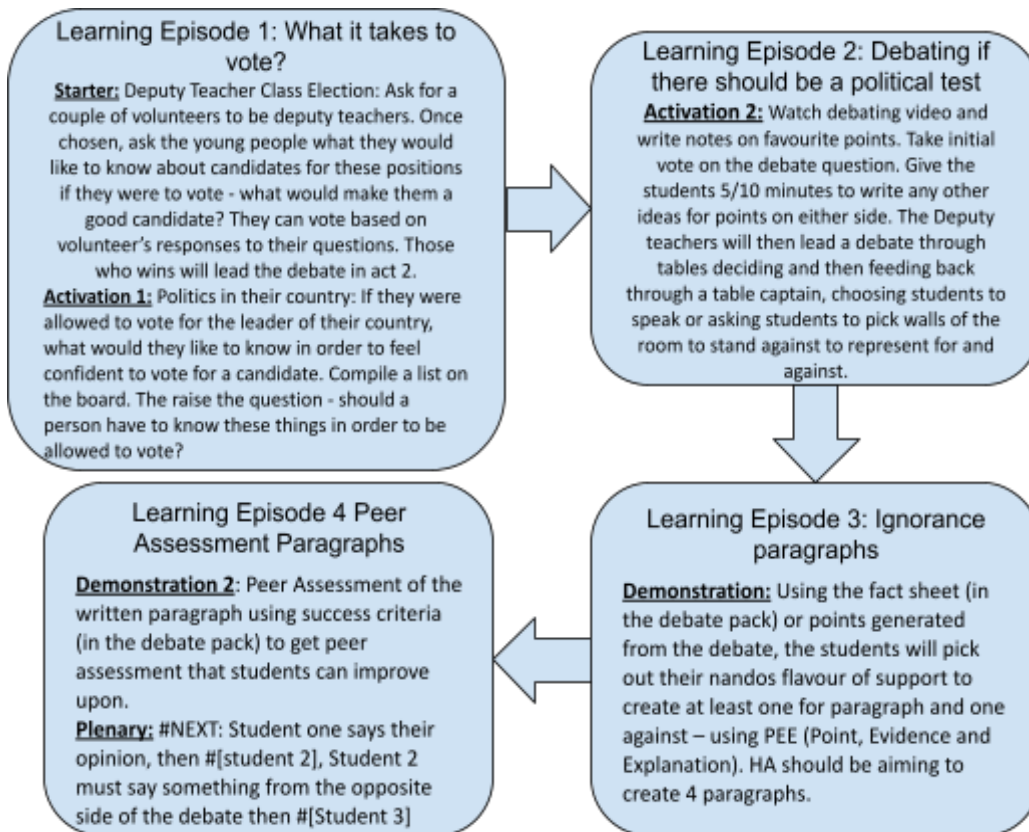
In the U.S., literacy tests were used for decades to prevent Black Americans from voting. Following the Voting Rights Act of 1965, these tests were abolished, and research shows that turnout increased dramatically in areas where literacy tests had previously been enforced, with Black voter registration rates rising by 27% in Southern states. [Source.](#)



# 'Debate your Perfect Point' Lesson Plan

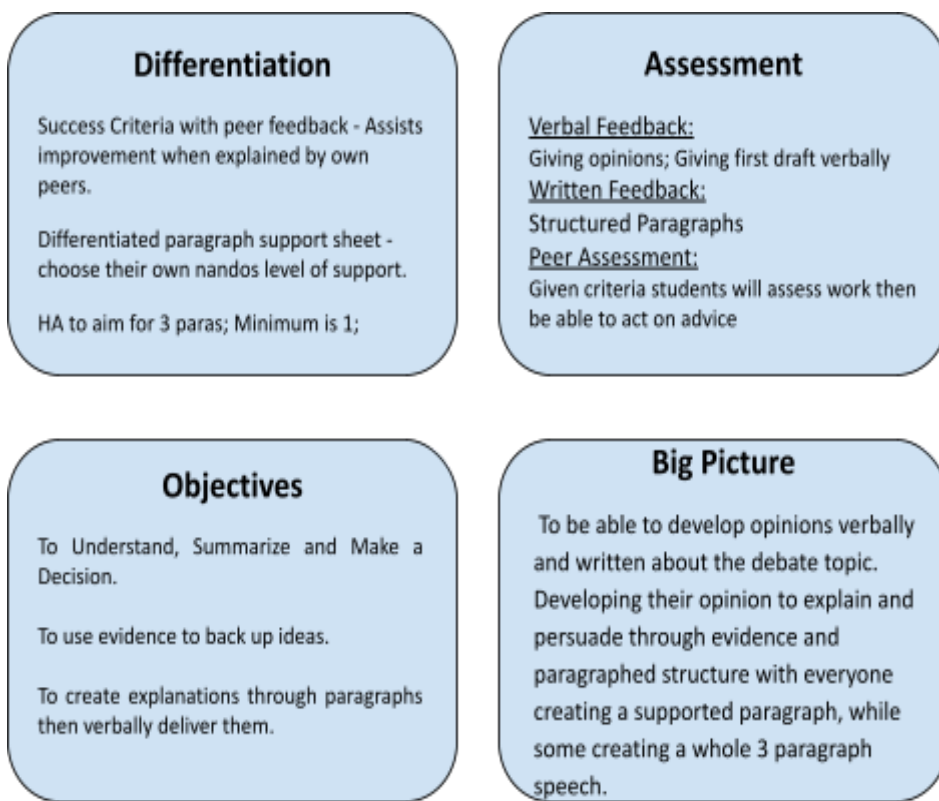
## Structure of the Lesson

Here's a lesson plan for you, including four learning episodes. It gives you ways to differentiate to make sure everyone's needs are met and a way to assess learning.



## What are we trying to achieve?

And how can we check every student can do this in your class?





## Success Criteria: Paragraph/Speech Writing

### Level 3

Make a single sentence point. Mention a fact and say what you think of it. Use full sentences. 1 paragraph written.

### Level 4

Make a simple and short sentence for your point. Make a simple descriptive comment about the fact chosen and the impact that it has. Some link to the question is established. 1-2 paragraphs written.

### Level 5

A simple sentence point. An effective piece of evidence that supports the point. Explanation of how the evidence supports the point and proves it. Link back to the original debate question and how it answers it. 2-3 Paragraphs written.

### Level 6

Clear, short point. Evidence is written in their own words. Explanation of how the evidence is relevant and proves the point. Explanation of why this evidence is important. Link back to the original debate question and whether this is the strongest point out of all points written. 3 Paragraphs written.

## Writing Paragraph Support

### POINT

Set out the point you are making in one sentence and which side of the debate it comes from.. Make sure to use the question words to phrase your viewpoint as it shows your understanding of the question.

### EVIDENCE

Demonstrate the view you are making with a specific piece of evidence – an example, fact or idea.

### EXPLANATION

Explain how the evidence you just used proves the point you made at the start of the paragraph.

### LINK

Relate how your point answers the question and the debate. Prove it? Disprove it?



# Sentence Starters

## POINT

LEMON & HERB: One reason why I (agree/disagree) with this debate is because...

MEDIUM: One point I have for this debate is...

HOT: You could say that...

## EVIDENCE

LEMON & HERB: One way I can prove my point is through this example...

MEDIUM: I can show this works through the fact that...

HOT: I know this because...

## EXPLANATION

LEMON & HERB: The evidence I have discussed above proves my point as...

MEDIUM: This example proves my point because...

HOT: Therefore, this proves my point as...

## LINK

LEMON & HERB: All together, this answers the debate question asked by...

MEDIUM: This point answers the overall question because...

HOT: These ideas answer the debate as...



**Post your debate on  
social media!**

**SHARE  
YOUR  
VOICE**

**Check out your certificates below ↓**

#BIGDEBATECUB  
TWITTER @SSCCTY  
INSTAGRAM @SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS



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# DEBATER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

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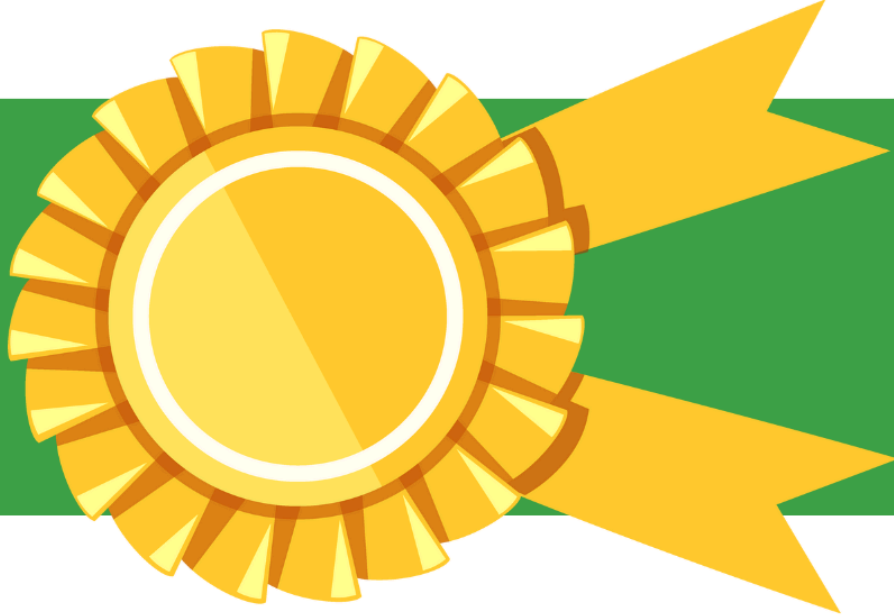
For debating fairly, respectfully and persuasively. Well done!

*Share a snap or video @SSCCTY on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!*



Greg Sanderson

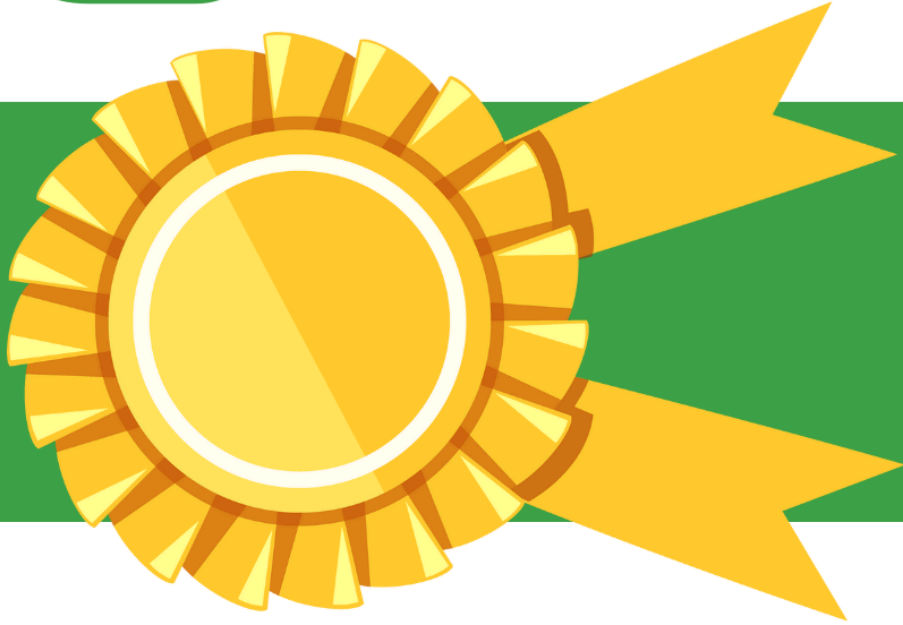
Founder, Smart School Councils



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Councils  
Community



# CLASS MEETING LEADER OF THE WEEK



We are proud to present this certificate to...

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For showing skill and confidence in leading today's Class Meeting.

**Share a snap or video @SSCCTY on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!**

Greg Sanderson  
Founder, Smart School Councils

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# BEST IDEA OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

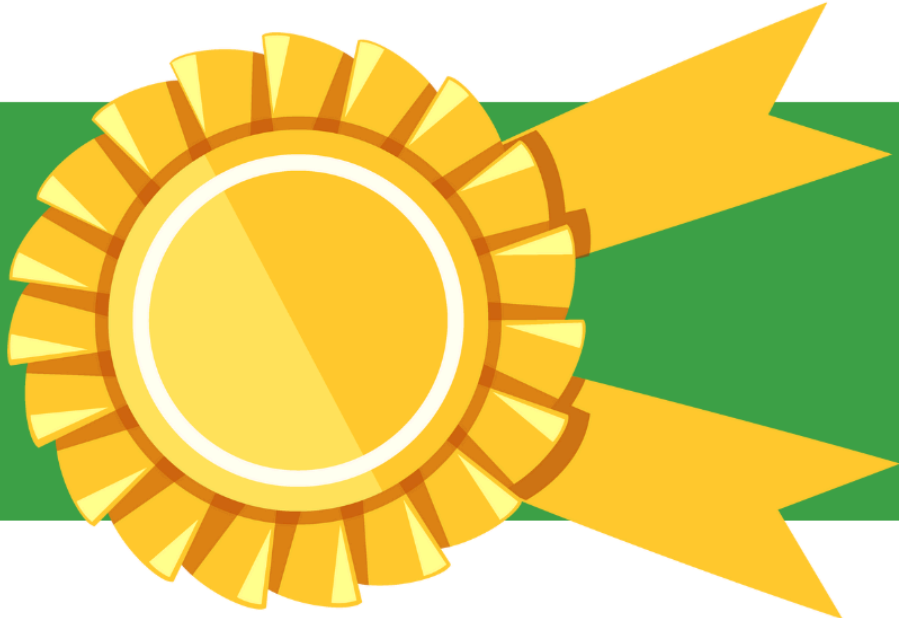
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For speaking up with a great new idea on today's topic. Amazing.

**Share a snap or video @SSCCTV on Twitter for a national shoutout and a prize!**



Greg Sanderson  
Founder, Smart School Councils



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