

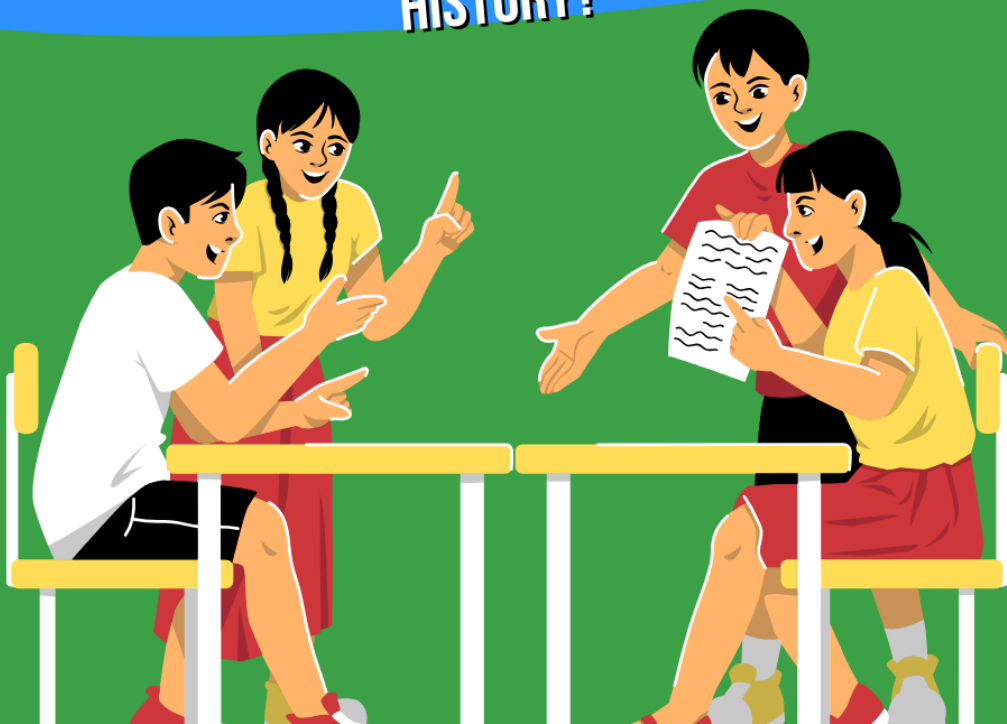


Smart School Councils

DEBATE PACK

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

**CAN YOU EVER TRULY KNOW WHAT HAPPENED IN
HISTORY?**



WWW.SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS.ORG.UK

How to Use this Debate Pack

Whether you have just a few minutes or a full lesson, this Debate Pack has got you covered. It's fully flexible to your time and needs.

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... Can you ever truly know what happened in history?



History is like a giant jigsaw, made up of puzzle pieces of information — from documents, artefacts or stories passed down through generations. Historians work hard to piece together evidence and uncover the truth, but can they ever truly know history? They face many challenges such as evidence being lost, destroyed, or never recorded at all. If records do exist, they can be biased, reflecting only one side of the story. On the other hand, modern techniques like carbon dating have given us more tools than ever to study history accurately.

So in this debate, you can either argue that you can truly know history or that you can't.

Brain Gym Question

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

Historians rely on different types of evidence to understand the past. Which of the following evidence is most likely to introduce bias?

- a. Archaeological findings
- b. Eyewitness accounts
- c. Ancient artefacts
- d. Carbon dating results

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

Historian Tacitus, known for his vivid accounts of early Imperial Rome, demonstrated both insightful observations and biases shaped by his personal beliefs and political views. His depictions, especially of figures like Emperor Nero, reflect both factual elements and personal agendas, illustrating how useful this accounts can be but also how subjective perspective can shape our understanding of historical truth. [Article](#).



FOR: You can truly know what happened in history



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

There is a historical consensus

You might think you can know history as there is historical consensus. Over time, historians often reach a consensus on key events and interpretations, based on lots of different evidence supporting it. While interpretations may evolve, this consensus represents a well-researched understanding of historical events.

You can know the truth as historians are always correcting past errors

You could say that you can know the truth as historians are always correcting past errors. Historians constantly revisit and revise historical narratives as new evidence emerges. This ongoing process of review and correction allows for a more accurate and refined understanding of the past.

Can you think of another reason you could argue that you can truly know history? 

Technological advancements can mean we know the truth



Technologies like satellite imagery, and genetic research allow historians to uncover previously hidden evidence, from ancient settlements to migration trails. DNA analysis, for example, has enhanced our understanding of ancient populations and cultural developments through showing where populations migrated, so we know more history than ever.

We have witnesses from the time

Many historical events are documented by witnesses at the time, providing direct evidence of what people experienced. Personal diaries, letters, and records give individuals' perspectives, as seen in well-preserved sources like Anne Frank's diary or the writings of Pliny the Younger on the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Varied sources avoids gaps in our knowledge



By examining multiple sources, historians build a a shared and evolving understanding of history. It allows for a general consensus about major events, even if the details are interpreted in varied ways. Greater Good Magazine emphasises that the focus on inclusivity and broad representation in historical studies helps reduce the gaps in our historical understanding. [Article](#).



AGAINST: You can't truly know what happened in history




Now let's change positions and consider why you might argue that you can't truly ever know what happened in history.

History is written by the winners

You might be thinking that history is written by the winners. The phrase captures the idea that those who emerge victorious in conflicts or hold power often control how events are recorded and remembered which leads to a biased portrayal of history, where the actions and perspectives of the victors are glorified, while the experiences and viewpoints of the defeated or marginalised groups are minimised or erased.

How much knowledge and who decides which?

Or you could argue that you can't tell the difference between myth and legend. Over time, historical facts can become intertwined with myths, legends, and folklore, making it difficult to distinguish between what truly happened and what has been embellished or altered through storytelling.

Can you think of another reason why you could argue that you can truly never know history? 

Language and culture barriers may lead to misunderstanding



Historians often interpret events based on their own cultural or ideological perspectives without knowing. This interpretation can affect what aspects of history are highlighted, how languages are translated, and how the events are judged, creating different "versions" of history. For example, colonial history is often interpreted differently by former colonisers and the colonised.

Having criteria has prevented specific communities from voting



Philosopher F.R. Ankersmit noted that the "truth" in history might be overstated, as interpretations are frequently shaped by cultural, political, or personal biases. This approach suggests that absolute knowledge of history may be an impossible ideal because each era brings different interpretations to the same events. [Source.](#)



FactSheet: Can you ever truly know what happened in history?



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

You can truly know what happened in history

Citizens believe in the importance of understanding history:

An American Alliance of Museums survey found that 96% of Americans believe understanding history is essential for informed decision-making about the future. This indicates that people see historical knowledge as something you can understand and influences their daily lives and society. [Source](#).

Scientific and technological methods have improved historical accuracy:

Historians like Ibn Khaldun pioneered scientific methods to study history as early as the 14th century, and all of these and today's scientific and technological methods help verify historical events. These approaches improve confidence in accuracy, making it possible to uncover past details with precision. [Source](#).

Citizens believe in trustworthy institutions such as museums to show us history:

An American Historical Association study found that institutions are ranked highly as trustworthy, with museums consistently rated above 80% in reliability by respondents. This perception is due, in part, to museums' display of authentic artefacts and curated exhibitions, which help provide a factual basis for historical narratives. [Source](#).

You can't truly know what happened in history

History isn't always provable like science:

Unlike physical sciences, history relies on evidence like artefacts and witness reports that can't be recreated or tested repeatedly. Establishing the "what" of an event is often achievable with high probability, but understanding the "how" and "why" remains less certain due to fewer direct observations. [Source](#).

Who writes the source affects the source's usefulness:

Many sources come from a narrow segment of society (e.g. high society or political elite citizens), limiting the perspectives we can access. For example, historical records about the fall of the Roman Empire are shaped largely by sources written by those in nobility or the elite, which might present biased or incomplete views. [Source](#).

What historical knowledge is remembered and looked after is selective:

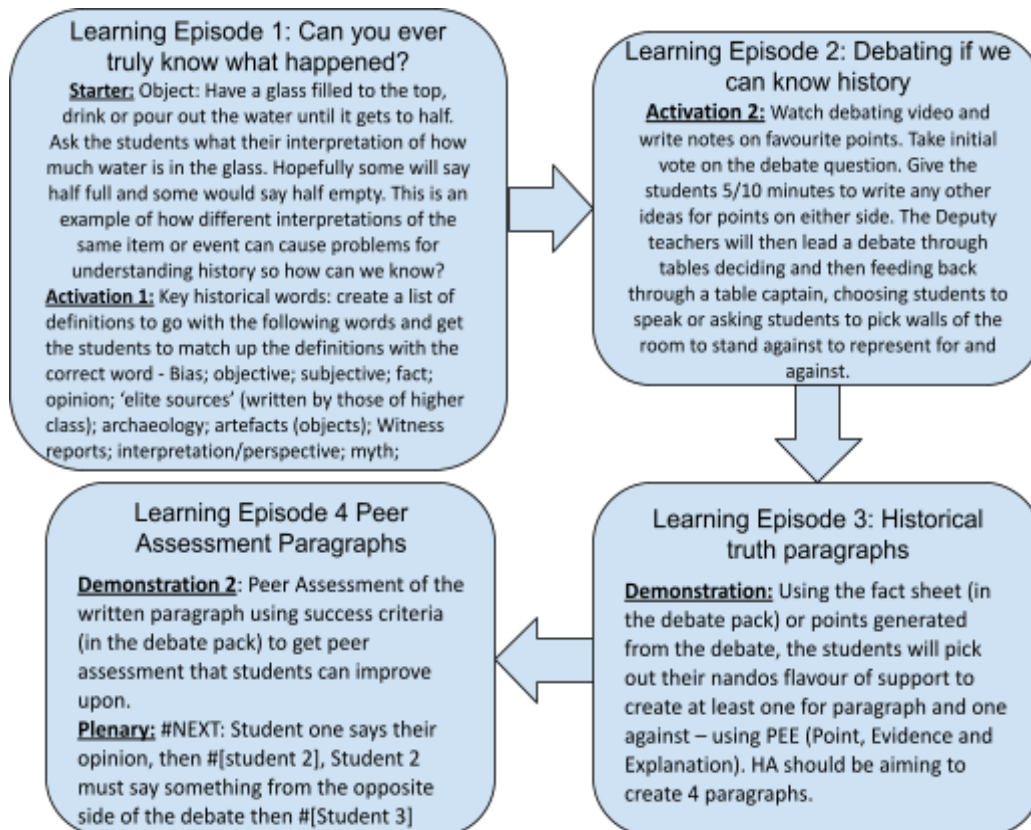
An American Council of Trustees survey found that only 23% of university students knew James Madison was the main author of the U.S. Constitution, while 99% recognised other popular figures. This shows how keeping important knowledge alive has its challenges even in well-educated populations. [Source](#).



'Debate your Perfect Point' Lesson Plan

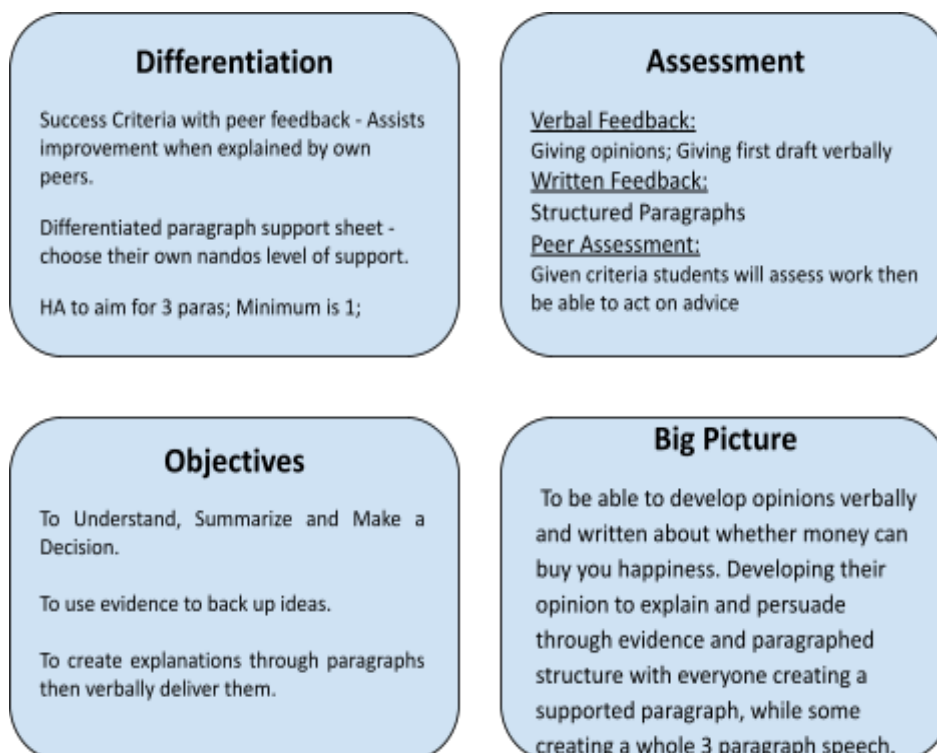
Structure of the Lesson

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 in your class, 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

We shout out the best opinions each week

#BIGDEBATECUB

TWITTER @SSCCTV

INSTAGRAM @SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS



DEBATER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

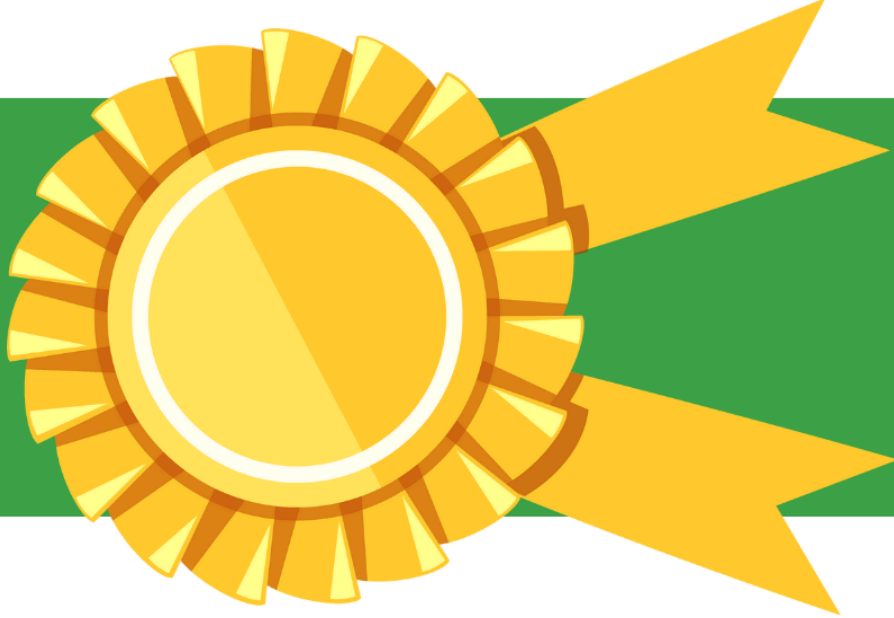
For debating fairly, respectfully and persuasively. Well done!

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



Smart
School
Councils
Community



CLASS MEETING LEADER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

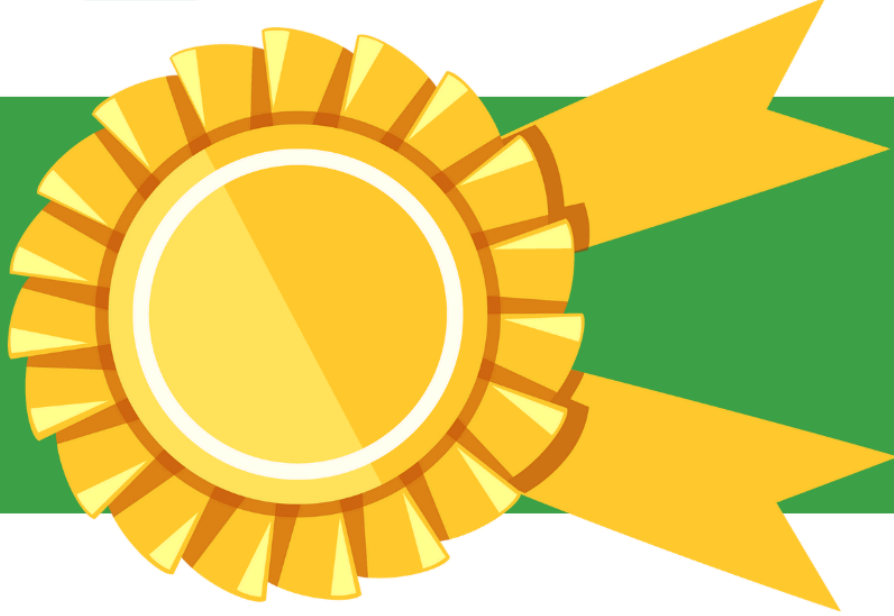
For showing skill and confidence in leading today's Class Meeting.

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



Smart
School
Councils
Community



BEST IDEA OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

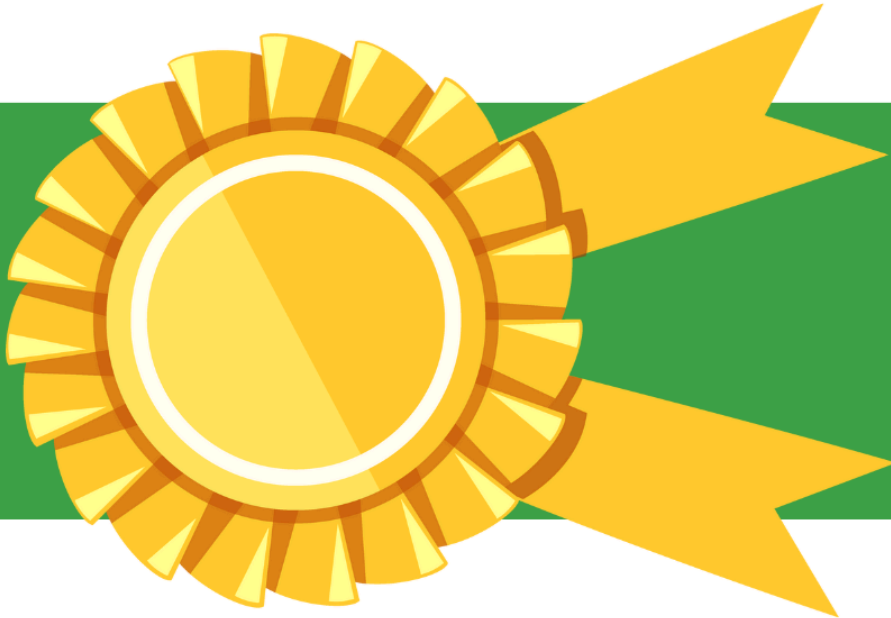
For speaking up with a great new idea on today's topic. Amazing.

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



Smart
School
Councils
Community

