



Smart School Councils

DEBATE PACK

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

**IS BANNING HARMFUL CONTENT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN
TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE HOW TO QUESTION IT?**



WWW.SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS.ORG

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 that's not in the video

Introduction and Brain Gym Question

Introduction



Welcome to Big Debate Club!

My name is Becky and today we are debating the question...

Is banning harmful content more effective than teaching young people how to question it?

Mahatma Gandhi once said 'Live as if you were to die tomorrow; learn as if you were to live forever' and with the internet being so full of information, you definitely could learn forever. But not all the information available is safe or true and could be harmful, especially to young people.

Protecting them could come through banning or blocking dangerous content completely to prevent harm. However, another way to effectively protect from harm could be to teach everyone how to spot lies, ask questions, and think critically. But which would be the most effective way to teach young people to deal with harmful content? You decide.

Brain Gym Question

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

According to the News Literacy Project, what is an example of critical thinking?

- a) Believing everything you see on your social feed
- b) Asking who made the content and why they made it
- c) Sharing a post because it has a lot of likes
- d) Ignoring anything that disagrees with your opinion

A large analysis of 51 studies looking at more than 6,000 students found that kids who took media literacy lessons were much better at spotting false or tricky information than those who didn't. (Source: *Communication Research*, [LINK](#))



FOR: Banning harmful content is more effective than teaching young people how to question it

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

Banning content means immediate protection

You might be thinking that banning content means immediate protection. According to the UK communications regulator Ofcom, 67% of children aged 8–17 have seen harmful content online. Banning this content can prevent real emotional harm to so many young people if those at home or at school banned that content.

Banning content prevents its spread and influence

You could say that banning content prevents its spread and influence. When harmful content is seen, it can have a negative influence on the viewer and if that person decides to share it, it can spread the violence, lies or hate it shows, by blocking this content, it prevents the spread of this negativity.

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that banning harmful content is more effective than teaching young people how to question it?

Some harms can never be unseen/undone so are time-sensitive

Banning has an immediate effect which can help with harms that are time-sensitive - causing harm immediately. Harmful trends, bullying or rapidly spreading self-harm content can cause immediate harm that education cannot reverse once it is viral — removal/bans can stop copying these trends. (Source: Reuters, [LINK](#))

Bans prevent damage for those who can't be as easily taught

Very young children or marginalised children with limited school access won't necessarily receive or act on teaching to question content. Content restrictions and platform-level protections act as a safety net for them. Global child-digital-life reports stress unequal access to education and skills, which means technical protections can be essential for those left out of formal teaching. (Source: UNICEF, [LINK](#))



AGAINST: Teaching young people how to question harmful content is more effective than banning it

Now let's change positions and consider why you might argue that teaching young people how to question harmful content is more effective than banning it.



Having these life skills is important

You might think that having these life skills is important. A Stanford study found that over two-thirds of students couldn't tell the difference between a news story and an advertisement labeled "sponsored content." Teaching media literacy helps young people navigate the digital world more wisely and staying informed their whole lives.

Teaching these skills to young people allows them freedom and choice

Or you could also say teaching these skills to young people allows them freedom and choice. UNESCO supports teaching media literacy worldwide, saying it empowers young people to make informed decisions rather than simply avoiding difficult topics. Learning to question ideas builds stronger citizens.

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that teaching young people how to question harmful content is more effective than banning it? 

Education prevents the volume of content from having an impact

13–18-year-olds average 8.5 hours per day of screen media in one recent census, so education builds fact-checking skill scales across the volume of what they are seen where bans might not be quick enough or reach as far - helping young people handle the volume and variety of content they will inevitably see. (Source: Common Sense Media, [LINK](#))



Education helps avoid bans that limit or harm vulnerable groups

Analyses of recent child-safety laws and content bans show risks of censoring free speech or harming vulnerable groups (for example, LGBTQ+ youth whose supportive content could be misclassified). Teaching young people to question and seek help reduces harm without narrowing expression or access to supportive communities. (Source: Brookings, [LINK](#))



FactSheet: Is banning harmful content more effective than teaching young people how to question it?



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

Banning Harmful Content

Parents' concerns would be addressed by banning content

In the UK, 70% of parents of 3–17-year-olds said they were worried about their child being bullied online - so parents would be reassured by strict platform controls, which includes guidelines to prevent certain content being posted and removing content that could be considered harmful. (Source: Ofcom, [LINK](#))

Some harms can never be unseen/undone so are time-sensitive

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Bans prevent damage for those who can't be as easily taught

Very young children or marginalised children with limited school access won't necessarily receive or act on teaching to question content. Content restrictions and platform-level protections act as a safety net for them. Global child-digital-life reports stress unequal access to education and skills, which means technical protections can be essential for those left out of formal teaching. (Source: UNICEF, [LINK](#))

Teaching young people to question harmful content

Education means the volume of content consumed won't have an impact

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Teaching is recommended by international organisations

UNESCO and others advocate national media-literacy strategies because they increase democratic resilience, protect rights, and empower citizens to recognise harmful or false content. A policy approach that builds civic skills is widely endorsed by global education bodies. (Source: UNESCO, [LINK](#))

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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

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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

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CLASS MEETING LEADER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

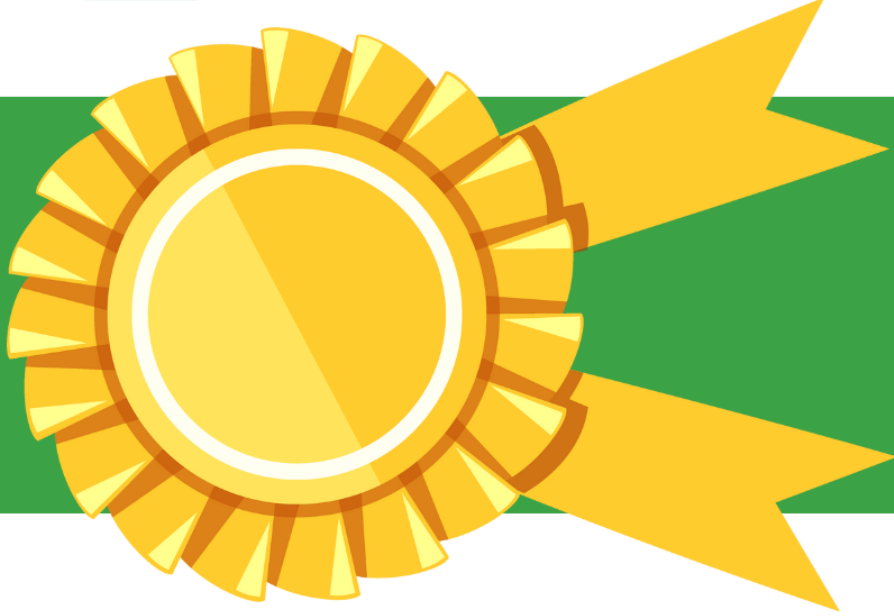
For showing skill and confidence in leading today's Class Meeting.

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



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BEST IDEA OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

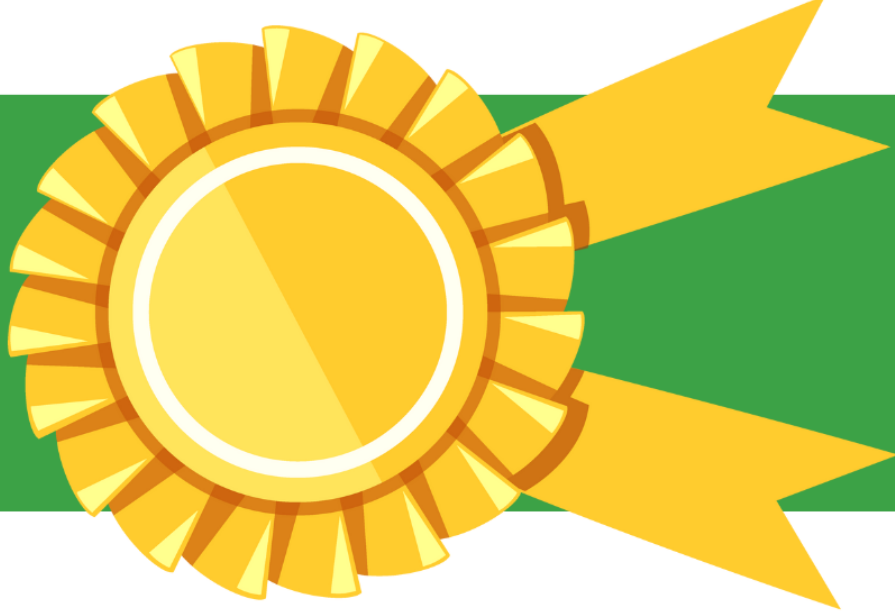
For speaking up with a great new idea on today's topic. Amazing.

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



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