

BIG DEBATE CLUB



**Smart School Councils**

# DEBATE PACK

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

**SHOULD YOU START LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
WHEN YOU ARE IN YEAR 1?**



[WWW.SMARTSCHOOLCOUNCILS.ORG](http://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...

Should you start learning a foreign language when you are in year 1?

What do you like learning about? Is it learning facts of the past in history, or how to do the processes in maths, or new skills in art? Either way, it's always fun to learn something new, but do you think you should start learning a new language as early as year 1?

Learning things young means your brain is more ready to learn different things and can take your time learning to interact with different communities, but would this be good on top of the learning you already do? So should we learn a new language in year 1? You decide.

## Brain Gym Question

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

According to the British Council, which foreign language is considered the *most important* for the UK to learn for future economic opportunities?

- a) Spanish
- b) Portuguese
- c) Mandarin
- d) Arabic

Learning a second language can improve memory, problem-solving, and multitasking. According to University of York, bilingual children can perform better on attention and switching tasks, showing improved brain function. (Source: *University of York*, [LINK](#))



# FOR: You should start learning a language in year 1

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


## Learning a language young is beneficial due to their ability to learn



You might be thinking that learning a new language before the age of 5 is really beneficial due to their ability to learn. Cambridge University research has shown that children can adopt speech patterns and recreate sounds much easier as their brain is more flexible, and children can learn through play and immersion which is a great way to learn something new meaning a more successful learner.

## The earlier you learn, the more likely you are to become fluent

You could say that the earlier you learn, the more likely you are to become fluent. Studies from the European Commission suggest that pupils who start languages earlier are more likely to become fluent later on. In the UK, only 32% of adults say they can hold a conversation in another language, but with everyone learning much earlier, that statistic would improve!

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that you should start learning a language in year 1? 

## It builds cultural awareness early



Learning a language helps children understand other cultures. According to the British Council, 75% of UK employers value language and cultural awareness skills, showing long-term benefits. (Source: *The British Council*, [LINK](#))

## It could improve academic performance in other subjects



Studies suggest children who learn another language often perform better in other subjects. Research linked to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages found students studying languages scored higher in reading and maths tests than those who did not. (Source: *ACTFL*, [LINK](#))



## AGAINST: You should not start learning a language in year 1

Now let's change positions and consider why you might argue that you should not start learning a language in year 1.


### There may not be enough well-trained teachers



You might think that there may not be enough well-trained teachers to teach everyone languages from year 1. According to a 2023 survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research, many UK primary schools report challenges in recruiting staff with strong language expertise. If lessons aren't high-quality, pupils may not benefit.

### Should we be putting more stress on such young students?

Or you could also ask should we be putting more stress on such young students? Year 1 pupils are transitioning from play-based learning to more formal schooling. Adding another subject could increase stress, especially when over 20% of pupils already need additional learning support.

Can you think of another reason why you might argue that you should not start learning a language in year 1? 

### It could take time away from other core subjects



Primary school time is limited. In England, only around 1 hour per week is typically spent on languages in early years, which may reduce time for literacy and numeracy. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))

### Not all schools have the resources for more language learning

Many primary schools would struggle to provide consistent language teaching on such a large scale from year 1 onwards. In the UK, surveys show over 40% of primary teachers feel unconfident teaching languages, which can affect learning quality. (Source: The British Council, [LINK](#))



# FactSheet: Should you start learning a foreign language when you are in year 1?



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

## You should start learning a language in year 1

### ***Young children learn languages more easily***

Research shows that children are especially good at learning languages before puberty. A study by MIT found that the ability to learn grammar like a native speaker is strongest up to around age 10, meaning starting at 5 gives a big advantage. (Source: MIT, [LINK](#))

### ***It can improve academic performance in other subjects***

Studies suggest children who learn another language often perform better in other subjects. Research linked to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages found students studying languages scored higher in reading and maths tests than those who did not. (Source: ACTFL, [LINK](#))

### ***It builds cultural awareness early***

Learning a language helps children understand other cultures. According to the British Council, 75% of UK employers value language and cultural awareness skills, showing long-term benefits. (Source: The British Council, [LINK](#))

## You should not start learning a language in year 1

### ***It could take time away from other core subjects***

Primary school time is limited. In England, only around 1 hour per week is typically spent on languages in early years, which may reduce time for literacy and numeracy. (Source: GOV.UK, [LINK](#))

### ***Not all schools have the resources for more language learning***

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### ***Older learners progress faster***

Older children and adults often learn more efficiently due to better focus and study skills. Research shows older learners can learn grammar rules more quickly than younger children in classroom settings. (Source: ScienceDirect, [LINK](#))

# 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 @SSCCTY**

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# DEBATER OF THE WEEK

We are proud to present this certificate to...

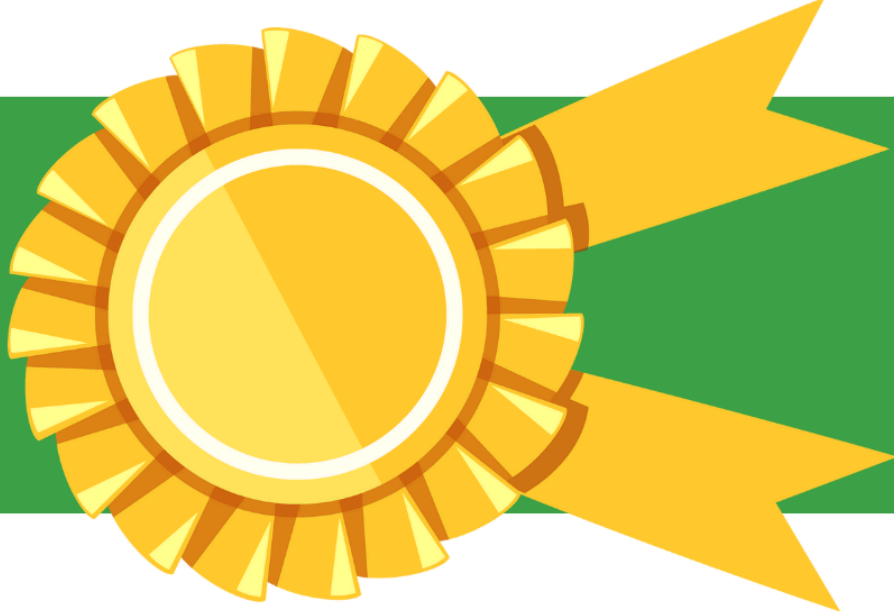
For debating fairly, respectfully and persuasively. Well done!

*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...

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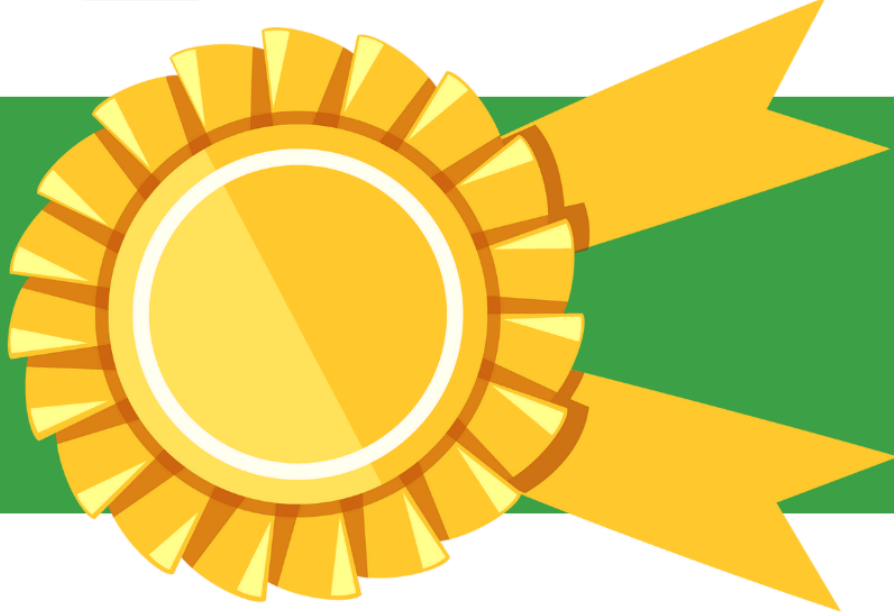
For showing skill and confidence in leading today's Class Meeting.

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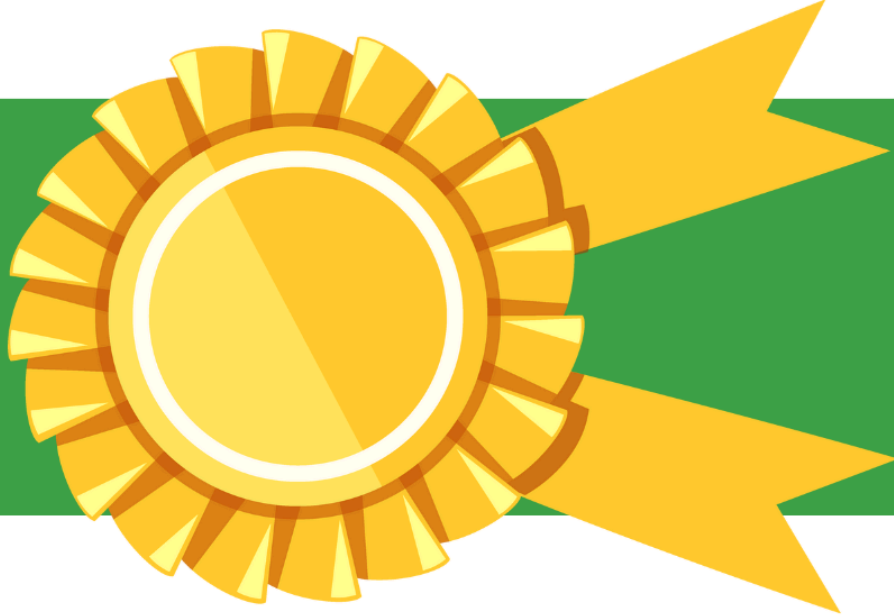
For speaking up with a great new idea on today's topic. Amazing.

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



Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils



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