

The Day After - Discourse Guide for Difficult or Controversial Topics



The Day After ...

A Classroom Discourse Guide for Timely Responses to Difficult, Controversial, or Controversialized Events

If you are reading this, you are likely planning to engage your students in discussion about a topic or recent event that is difficult, controversial, or even painful. Schools are important social centers - what impacts our students and their families is carried with them into our classrooms. When something difficult or tragic happens, schools should bring students reassurance through community and relationships, affirm emotions, and create space to make sense and meaning together. Engaging thoughtfully and critically with these moments are also crucial lifelong skills to promote engagement in the broader community and world from our young people.

The day after (or in some cases the day of) a challenging political, economic, social, or environmental event our students likely have questions, fears, emotions and anxieties. They will not only need to talk and process, but will also want to better understand the circumstances, history, perspectives, and calls to action surrounding the event. Engaging in such learning is difficult and important. We commend you on creating this space with and for your students.

Educators and staff members may also face challenging personal circumstances and emotions. Students and staff alike deserve a safe and supportive space to process, grieve, share, reflect, learn, and take action together. Therefore, guidance and resources are included here to support time for processing and discourse for both staff and students.

Civil discourse is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. Now more than ever, schools must nurture our willingness and ability to engage and deliberate with others on important, controversial, and sometimes difficult topics in our communities. We thank you and honor you for taking this opportunity to engage in supportive discussions and lessons about difficult but important events and issues, and we hope you find the resources collected here helpful.

How to use this guide:

This guidance was designed to generally support schools, regardless of grade or content area, in developing a strategic and research-based response for students following difficult, traumatic, or controversial events. Use this guide on your own, or better yet with your school team, to prepare for discourse with students the day after such events.

Social Science teachers have a unique role to play in supporting students by investigating social, political, economic, historic, and environmental contexts of the event. To support them, we provide event-specific resources that can support their inquiries. Most recently, you can find the Rittenhouse Verdict Resources and the McMichael/Bryant Verdict resources.

For difficult conversations specifically about race and racism, find the [Say Their Names](#) guidance which has been recently updated.

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Guidance, resources and pedagogical suggestions gathered here to support administration and staff in responding to difficult, controversial, or traumatic public events with students. Sections 1 and 2 are meant for all teachers, to support a general school wide response. Section 3 is meant specifically for Social Science teachers who might be facilitating thoughtful and critical engagement with challenging current events.

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Section 1: Prepare yourself and Plan With Colleagues

Start With Your Own Readiness: *Before engaging with students in difficult conversations, teachers and teams need to take time to reflect and prepare.*

- A.** Take Care of your Own Immediate Needs: Take the time you need to [take care of yourself](#) and process your own feelings, beliefs, and experiences. Ask yourself: Am I emotionally able to assist my students at this time? What support do I need? Who will I go to for support?
- [Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care Assessment and Planning Tool](#) is full of resources such as self-assessments, definitions, and self-care strategies.
 - [MyLife](#) is an app that offers short, guided meditations and mindfulness activities.
 - [Employee Assistance Program](#): CPS staff and eligible dependents or household members can access up to five free confidential counseling sessions.
- B.** Consider Your Own Identity: ([From Facing History and Ourselves](#))
Reflect on how your own identity, values, political positions, and beliefs influence how you respond to current events and how you address them in the classroom. There may be times when your identity or background gives you a particular emotional connection or useful insight into an event. For events that touch on issues outside of your lived experience, it can be helpful to uplift the voices of those with lived experience to inform your teaching. If possible, consider building a network with other educators who teach current events in your community to share teaching resources and to support each other in the wake of troubling news.
Reflect:
- What factors make up your identity (for example, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs) and how do these factors influence how you respond to different current events?
 - How can you build professional networks that support your teaching of current events?
 - How can you incorporate the voices of those with lived experience of the issues you teach?
- C.** Consider your role and relationship to others: Reflect on your role in your school community and how you want to show up for your students, colleagues, and community. Take time to consider the people who will need your support in your school community, such as your colleagues, students, principal, or families. Consider what they will need from you and what they might be bringing with them into the spaces you share. Some questions to consider:
- What perspectives will others bring?
 - What can be done before, during, and after your time together to ensure a safe space for everyone?
 - What opportunities do you have to create protected time and space for those who need it most?
 - What small things can you do to alleviate tension, show love, affirm others' feelings, and help others feel supported?

- What stressors can be addressed so you can be present for yourself and others at this moment?
- D. Ensure you are fully aware of the Facts: In order to facilitate discourse with students and be responsive to their needs it is critical that you are informed and aware of the facts of the event as well as the misinformation and disinformation that inevitably will surface through social media and opinion news channels. Consider these abbreviated tips posed by [On the Media](#) to audit your own media consumption and production during breaking current events. (Section 3 offers further resources to support media literacy for yourself and your classroom):
1. *In the most immediate aftermath, news outlets may get it wrong.*
 2. *Don't trust anonymous sources or stories that cite another news outlet as the source of their information.*
 4. *Pay attention to the language the media uses.*
 5. *Look for news outlets close to the incident.*
 6. *Compare multiple sources.*
 7. *Big news brings out the fakers. And photoshoppers.*
 8. *Beware reflexive retweeting (yours and others!).*

This process will also prepare you to help students combat malinformation and develop the civic media literacy skills they need to navigate a media-dominant disinformation-rich world.

- E. Ensure you are aware of limitations and ethical parameters for discourse: Educators must remember that we hold a special position of power when it comes to our students. As teachers, we must be especially thoughtful when we decide whether and how to discuss controversial and political issues with students who may not share the same points of view. Teachers do not have the constitutional right to introduce their own political views to students, “but must stick to the prescribed curriculum.” *Mayer v. Monroe County Cmty. Sch. Corp.* (7th Cir. 2007). However, it is important that students have the opportunity to consider, analyze, and discuss current and important issues in society. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate student-learning opportunities that foster critical thinking and deliberation about political issues from multiple perspectives; promote the sharing of student opinions, values and questions in a supportive environment; and allow time for students to reflect and identify next steps for the community.

In order to create space for students to learn about and discuss controversial issues, and respond to students who have emotional responses, we encourage schools and teachers to provide safe and welcoming spaces for students to share their views. Students may have strong emotions related to the event, and teachers and other staff should model and help them express their feelings in civil and productive ways. Some schools may consider providing additional support, such as a designated room with support staff who can guide students through processing their emotions. Students who need additional support should be referred to the school counselor, social worker, and/or behavioral health team.

Prioritize time to plan with others and prepare for difficult conversations

- A. Connect with your team/staff to process, support, and prepare: Difficult or traumatic events can have an impact on all of us in ways we might not fully comprehend. Check in on your colleagues and team, and discuss how you can care for and support the needs of your students, staff, and families.

It is important to make space to discuss, share feelings, identify questions and concerns, and prepare for students' questions and needs. It takes a lot of energy to facilitate safe spaces for students, so it is critical that you have the time and support you need to care for yourself and support one another.

Discuss the issue with colleagues in addition to thinking about your students, and the impact on your community, before preparing for a discussion with students. You can find [two protocols for discussing and processing difficult or controversial topics with colleagues here](#). (Here you will find activities and questions designed to make space for everyone, and plan for next steps.)

- B. Develop your action plan - for students and yourselves: Consider meeting with your colleagues to determine what kind of coordination and collaboration you need to do across classrooms to center students and their experiences at school and ensure you feel supported. For instance:
- First period to last period - consider your students' experiences in your classes as they progress throughout the day. What is happening in the first period the day after an event? How can we ensure students are not engaged in the same reflection protocol in each of their classes? How can we ensure this current topic is addressed in a meaningful way? By whom?
 - Consider content areas: included in this guide are the check-in protocols that can happen in any classroom (e.g. all first period classrooms do a reflection protocol), and resources for Social Science instruction. It is important to ensure Social Science classrooms have what they need to teach about the social, political, historical, and/or economic contexts of the event.
 - Identify students that might need additional support from counselors or social workers. And ensure you communicate with administration about any concerns or flags that might need to be addressed with students and families.
 - Plan for regular check-ins with one another over the coming weeks to discuss students' needs. Meet as grade level teams to discuss any students that might need more direct support.
 - Consider doing some of the check-in activities with your staff/team over the coming days or weeks; it is important to make space to discuss, share feelings, identify questions and concerns of your own, and prepare for students' questions and needs. It takes a lot of energy to facilitate safe spaces for students, so it is critical that you have the time and support you need to care for yourself and support one another.

- C. Know How to Protect and Nurture Students' Emotional Needs: Students may respond in a variety of ways to the emotional and political discourse that may arise from a given event. These emotions might include fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, and desensitization. These and other feelings may especially be present for students who have been exposed to or have experienced trauma. Schools can help all students understand and process their emotions by ensuring [safe, supportive school climates](#) with consistent routines and building positive adult-student relationships. Classroom discussions around the impact of difficult events are also important opportunities to build students' [social and emotional competencies](#) and create non-judgmental spaces for students to express their emotions.

In some cases, students' emotional responses may manifest as inattention, irritability, or defiance. School staff should be aware of signs of trauma or distress in [elementary](#) and [high school](#) students and refer students, as necessary, for additional support through the school's Behavioral Health Team/MTSS team or counselor/clinician. See [SEL and Mental Health resources](#) for additional resources. In addition teachers and schools can also share additional resources with families:

- [Chicago Resource Guide](#)
 - [Mental Health Association of Greater Chicago](#), (800) 209-8114
 - [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), (312) 563-00445
 - SASS/CARES Hotline (for students in crisis and a danger to self or others) (800) 345-9049
 - Suicide Prevention Hotline - (800) 273-TALK
- D. Prepare with strategies to support symptoms of trauma & feelings of anxiety: Teaching for Justice's "[When Bad Things Happen](#)" can help teachers learn how to frame their response to their students emotional needs using the "Listen, Protect, Connect—Model & Teach" that emphasizes these steps: LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL, TEACH.

Teachers may want to have regular check-ins with students they suspect may be triggered by the events in the media and/or have a history of exposure to traumatic events. Check-ins should include discussing the student's current emotional state and coping skills they can utilize when upset, distressed, or anxious.

SECTION 2: The Days After - Engage Students (for all teachers)

An important part of our role as educators and school leaders is to find ways to engage students in discussion of difficult, controversial, or even emotionally-charged topics in a safe and productive manner. In the two following sections, you will find guidance and resources for supporting, managing, and reflecting on student civil discourse, civic learning, and civic engagement at your school in the immediate wake of challenging current events

Important Notes:

- ★ This section is designed for a general staff approach to supporting students on the day(s) after a difficult event. [Section 3](#) includes activities and guidance specifically for Social Science teachers. We recommend that instruction about government, politics, law, and civic engagement be facilitated by teachers trained in this area.
- ★ Before you begin, coordinate with colleagues. [See Section 1B](#)

A. Engage Students

On the day of/after and over the coming weeks it is important to establish a safe and supportive classroom environment, especially if you are going to facilitate lessons and discussions around the issues surrounding the event. Focus on developing, revisiting, and honoring classroom agreements. Continue to use check-in activities before, during, and after class lessons. We have outlined some suggested activities to support you in this effort:

1. Before discussion, prepare students and safe spaces: Tell students you are going to discuss and learn about [event]. If possible, do this the day before so students can prepare and decide if they want to participate. The more predictable the components of the discussion are, the more students can prepare themselves for constructive participation.

Communicate options: Tell students that it is okay if they do not want to participate in the discussion. Explain to the class that we all have our own ways of coping with these situations and if a student chooses not to participate at this time, we should respect their decision. Share with students that if, at any time, they decide they do not want to participate in the discussion, they have options such as going to another room or a quiet corner, or reading independently.

Give students the option to draw or write out their thoughts through journaling, perhaps anonymously, beforehand or instead of sharing verbally.

Communicate or establish a signal or protocol students can use with you so that they may privately retreat to another space if needed.

**Remember not to take symptoms of trauma (such as anger, withdrawal, distance, and irritability) personally. If a young person does not want to talk or share, that is okay. Be aware of signs of [grief](#), trauma ([elementary/high school](#)), or distress and refer students, as necessary, for additional support through your Behavioral Health Team/MTSS team or counselor/clinician. See more guidance for supporting students through trauma [here](#).*

2. Set agreements and routines that will promote a supportive discussion: Classroom agreements are critical for nurturing an environment for discussing difficult topics. Constructing agreements together as a classroom helps build community and trust, elevates shared values, and reminds the class how they have agreed to behave and participate during discussions. This practice also helps students to self-regulate by using the agreements as a reminder when the discussion falls off track or becomes challenging. Students can also use the agreements to remind one another of the space they envisioned they needed together.

For the discussion of difficult topics, agreements should be specific, focus on seeking understanding different perspectives, and promote supportive, encouraging actions students can take to support one another. *See more guidance for establishing shared agreements [here](#).* Throughout the discussion, remind students of your agreements, and encourage students to use them, name them, and return to them, and to feel empowered to identify when the agreements are not being honored. Consider proposing the sample agreements for difficult discussions found [here](#) and below:

- We acknowledge it’s okay to not be okay. This is a difficult discussion because it’s complex with a variety of emotions and experiences tied to it. First and foremost we will work as a community to ensure everyone has what they need.
- We recognize our humanity and the humanity of others. We know that we all carry a lot of emotions, we are all living through and with trauma right now, and it’s okay to not be okay. Therefore, we will ensure that we can all be what we need to be in this space, and that we will love and uplift each other by giving words of encouragement or finger snaps for support.
- We share time to speak. Take a step back if others have not yet participated. Ask others to share their thoughts or feelings. If you don’t want to share your own thoughts, acknowledge someone else’s.
- We listen and speak with care. We speak with mindfulness of others. We listen carefully and try to understand perspectives of those we disagree with. We learn how to do better in the future.
- We listen harder when we disagree: If we find ourselves wanting to revise what someone else is saying and how they’re saying it, we try to listen and ask questions to better understand their experiences that informed their opinion.
- We recognize the factors that have shaped our perspectives, including life experience, family, culture, and all the things that make up our identity. We understand that others will come to these discussions with similar and different experiences from ours. We stay open to informing our perspectives based on what we learn from others.
- We agree that stories stay in and learning goes out. When we leave this space we will continue to reflect and grow, but we will not repeat what others have said.
- We advocate for ourselves. We communicate our needs by following the protocols/norms/agreements in this class. This includes “hitting the pause button” or choosing to step away from conversations or content that may be triggering for ourselves. If we recognize that we could use additional support, requesting to talk to a counselor individually is one way we can choose to identify this need.

Important note on managing “hot moments” or disagreements: When students disagree, or if discussion escalates, ask students to pause and take a breath and then reconnect to your agreements. Ask students to name the agreement they/we need most right now in this moment before we can move forward. Or, ask them to name the agreement they need to recommit to in this moment of disagreement. We recommend that you familiarize yourself with [ways to manage “hot moments”](#) in classroom discussion.

3. Begin where students are with their lived experiences: There will be a variety of emotions around recent events or connections to other grief and trauma they’ve experienced, so it is important to create opportunities periodically to find out how students are feeling and encourage the discussion of feelings regularly. Model this practice by sharing your feelings, but remember that how adults express their emotions can influence and impact how students react and express their feelings.

Leverage protocols like the following (note: protocols can be used individually or consecutively) to make space for students to share what they know, what they have experienced, how they are feeling, and any questions they might have:

- Start with personal reflection by reviewing the [CPS Equity CURVE](#), and take turns asking students to name what they need in this moment. Have them share outloud, in-person, or write the word in the chat online.
- Next, use this [circles and connections protocol](#) (with accompanying jamboard for virtual settings) to create an open space for students to document what they are thinking and feeling, questions they have, and ways they’d like to be supported. Give plenty of time for this, consider playing music, and check in if they need more time. Once completed, ask students to read through the post-its, and discuss what they notice, their questions, and any feelings they might want to share. Consider going back to and strengthening your agreements if needed.

Additional protocols for helping students to connect, process, and share their feelings, questions:

- This [virtual gallery walk](#) to have students document what they’re thinking and feeling, questions they have, and ways they’d like to be supported in your class community. Reflect on the post-its after completion.
 - SRI’s [Connections](#) protocol to make space to hear from your students about the feelings, ideas or thoughts with which they are coming into class.
 - Use the “[Head, Heart, Feet](#)” protocol: Ask students to share one or all three of the following prompts through quiet journaling, the chat, in small groups, or as a whole group. Head: What are you thinking about? Heart: What are you feeling? Feet: What do you need others to do? What will you do?
 - Provide students with creative outlets or activities to express their feelings. Invite them to write a poem, song, rap, create a meme, or draw a picture. Explore these lessons and considerations for how to use [music](#), [poetry](#), and [art](#) to have students reflect on the power of art as a medium of expression as well as a way to promote positive change. Consider making them public by displaying them in your building or creating a digital school community space (such as Jamboard, Padlet, or Google Slides) for students to share their creations publicly.
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4. Move into discussion - *Important Note, steps 1-3 above should have been completed before you move to discussion).*

First, share the discussion questions with students and give them time to journal (write or draw) their answers to the questions. Then, move to discussion (and remind everyone of your agreements) by inviting students to share their thoughts and writing with the group. Here are some journaling prompts you can choose from. We suggest making space for students to first journal their thoughts, then have the opportunity to share in small groups, then as a whole group:

1. What are you thinking? What are you feeling? List and describe your emotions
2. What members of our classroom community and broader community might be feeling most vulnerable at this moment?
3. How can we support one another as a classroom community?
4. What does this event mean to you? To our City? To our Country?
5. What kinds of change or actions are people calling for?
6. What is surprising? What is interesting? What is troubling?
7. What is one thing we could do—individually, as a group, or as a society—to show love for one another during this time?
8. What would you like to do for our community or the world to address the issue?
9. What is valuable about your perspective as a young person in Chicago, and who would benefit from learning about your perspective?
10. Whose perspective do you need to learn more about and why?
11. What have we learned that will inform the future of our city?
12. What remaining questions do you still have?

Additional resources that can be leveraged within the above activities: [Panorama 21 Quick Questions to Check-in on Your Students' Well Being](#); [Responding to Community Trauma Circle Script](#) (adapted from *Circle Forward*)

Additional resources and models to support you in facilitating civil conversations with students:

- [Facing History and Ourselves - Civil Conversations](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance Guide on Discussing Race, Racism and Difficult Topics.](#)
- [Managing Strong Emotional Reactions](#)

5. After you engage with students, reflect: It is important to reflect on how your school and teaching teams work together to respond and support students. We encourage you to reflect on your work before, during, and after the controversy. Use your findings to make a plan for continuous improvement in ways your school community supports and engages students. The following questions are designed to support a team reflective discussion:

1. What messages did our actions and decisions send to students?
2. How well do we know our students? Do they feel our support?
3. How will we continue to support and engage with our students moving forward?
4. What did our actions and communications teach students about political and civic participation?
5. How can we build capacity for civic discourse and engagement by making it a core practice to discuss and deliberate with students?

SECTION 3: THE DAYS and WEEKS AFTER - Deepen understanding and sense-making through inquiry (Social Science Classrooms)

The Social Science classroom is an important and dedicated space where young people: generate questions; explore their curiosities; and learn about, analyze, and critique historical as well as social, political, and economic aspects of our society and government. During times of social or political strife, these classrooms can and should adjust planned learning to make space to more deeply explore the event, and the sociopolitical contexts, and to make important connections to broader themes of their school year.

[The Inquiry Arc Framework](#) and [IL Social Science Learning Standards](#) are designed to help teachers be responsive to the current moment through thematic inquiry. Course essential questions and themes are available to ground current event inquiries and help students make connections between prior learning and current events. After students have had the space needed to process their response and thinking, further exploration of larger and longer-term topics can deepen understanding beyond the current headline. When engaging in deeper investigation of issues or controversies, students should always (in this order):

1. connect personally to the event and/or hear from others;
2. understand the facts, and identify misinformation;
3. consider varied perspectives, and how people are impacted
4. wrestle with the complexities of the issue/event
5. deliberate the issue(s), policy implications;
6. draw and communicate conclusions;
7. consider what comes next (and have the option to take action)

In this section you will find instructional strategies and guidance for constructing inquiries that are responsive to students needs and the current moment. In addition, you can find up-to-date resources that can be used within the inquiry on topics related to timely events on the SSCE website.

- A. [Deciding to Dig Deeper](#): preparing for discourse through inquiry on a difficult topic
- B. [Discourse within Inquiry](#): when to discuss, and when to deliberate
- C. Resources and Essential Questions on the event to Support Student-Driven Inquiry
- D. Communicate conclusions and apply knowledge of {event] through informed actions

[Deciding to Dig Deeper](#): An introductory discussion of the issue is necessary in order to generate further interest in exploring both the event itself and its connection to students' lives and communities. If you choose to continue study of this issue with your students, make sure you make space for students to process their reactions first (see guidance in Section 1 and 2).

In preparing for a discussion on the event and surrounding issues, teachers should:

- Ground the inquiry using a reflective and metacognitive tool;
- Provide resources and scaffold instruction so that students learn the background they need in order to participate;
- Provide materials that students can understand and grapple with a “fair-hearing” of multiple points of view;
- Determine form or method of discussion that is appropriate for the topic;
- Refresh and recommit to community norms and agreements for safe and courageous conversations;
- Remind students of ways they can communicate if they are uncomfortable.

Ground the Inquiry - Aside from making personal connections to the topic, it is important to tap into (and document) student's current understanding so that they can continue to build on that understanding throughout the inquiry. Two strategies can provide the foundation for the deeper investigations of these complex events:

- A) Iceberg Strategy (adapted from Facing History): [Iceberg Diagrams](#) teaching strategy helps students gain awareness of the numerous underlying causes that give rise to an event. It's often difficult for students to see these causes because they rest "beneath the surface." This strategy can be used as a way for students to organize their notes as they learn about an event, as a way to review material, or as an assessment tool. In the initial wake of an event, the iceberg can be used both as an assessment of students' knowledge on the topic, as well as a way to start generating curiosity and questions around the event (see the Question Formulation Technique below). By asking students what they know and what is visible on the surface, initial explorations of what they understand to be the more complex underlying causes can be generated.

- B) Question Formulation Technique: Allow students to ask and evaluate their own questions by using the [Question Formulation Technique](#) (QFT) or making a list of all the related questions they can think of. These questions are a window into what students already know, think they know, want to know and what they don't know. Ask students to identify which questions can be answered through research and which should be discussed further. Have students turn some of the questions into statements and analyze the source of that information, asking: "What do I know, and how do I know it?" Before proceeding, consider making time to discuss reliable versus unreliable sources.

After you have compiled and discussed the questions, have students select questions that they would like to investigate together. They can deepen their understanding by researching historical sources and media coverage or interviewing people they know. Use the questions and subsequent inquiry to drive discussion and explore students' opinions and values while promoting dialogue rather than debate.

Discourse within Inquiry: when to discuss, and when to deliberate

Discourse is an important skill and strategy within a social science classroom and should occur throughout an inquiry. However, discourse around difficult or controversial topics takes planning and consideration. A range of discussion strategies provide opportunities for students to strengthen their participatory civic skills, habits and dispositions, including but not limited to critical thinking, agency, and listening.

Discussion and deliberation are different modes of discourse, and require different skills and intention. Below three common modes of discourse are outlined below to illustrate their purpose, and why *debate is a mode of discourse that should not be used for discourse on difficult or controversial or controversialized topics.*

| DIALOGUE | DELIBERATION | DEBATE |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Purpose and Dispositions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● exchanging views and information ● Discussion = “talking together” ● stories, experiences, viewpoints ● May focus on a topic, theme, idea, problems, issues, etc., ● Can be broad or focused ● not adversarial or competing <p>Most useful: for talking together about a topic without desiring any particular outcome from the conversation. Useful for exchanging perspectives, summarizing knowledge and understanding, affirming others views and experiences.</p> | <p>Purpose and Dispositions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collective, shared understanding ● focus on listening to finding meaning ● examines all approaches, perspectives, assumptions and biases ● assumes many answers and that there is a workable solution 4 common good ● Opens possibilities for new solutions ● Participants explore what’s important to them and others <p>Most useful: when a decision or criteria for a decision, about the best way(s) to approach an issue or problem is needed.</p> | <p>Purpose and Dispositions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To win ● search for weakness or flaws in other positions ● Counter other positions, prove wrong ● Commit to your beliefs ● oppositional - seeks to prove the other position is wrong ● defends assumptions as truth <p>Not recommended - Debate is most useful when a position or course of action is being advocated and winning is the goal. In this case, debate is not encouraged as a mode of discourse for democratic, civic discourse.</p> |

Dialogue Strategies:

- [Think Pair Share](#) - This format gives students the opportunity to thoughtfully respond to questions in written form and to engage in meaningful discussion with other students about these issues.
- [Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn](#) - This structured format from Facing History provides reflection time and helps students develop their discussion skills with a focus on strengthening their listening skills. This is an especially useful discussion format when your class is discussing controversial topics.
- [Socratic Seminar](#) - Socratic Seminar is useful if you are grounding your discussion on one or more texts. Students prepare by reading a text or group of texts and writing some higher-order discussion questions about the text. On seminar day, students sit in a circle and an introductory, open-ended question is posed by the teacher or student discussion leader.
- [Fishbowl Discussion](#) - This [strategy](#) is especially useful when you want to make sure all students participate in a discussion, when you want to help students reflect on what a good discussion looks like, and when you need a structure for discussing controversial or difficult topics.

Deliberation Strategies:

- [Philosophical Chairs](#) - This framework for whole-class discussions in an exercise that fosters careful listening and encourages every student to contribute their thoughts.
- Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) - [This strategy](#) asks students to suspend their current beliefs and consider varied perspectives on the issue, collaborate with others to

ensure a shared understanding of those perspectives, and work to come to consensus for effective policy recommendations despite differing views

- [Co-pilot Discussion](#) - students participate in a small group discussion, with co-pilots to support and deepen thinking during breaks. A great way to differentiate for varied student needs, include many voices, and build opportunities for consensus.
 - [Affinity Mapping](#) - Students generate responses by writing ideas on post-it notes (one idea per note) and place them into similar categories and notice patterns in thinking and ideas. Great for building consensus
 - [Pinwheel discussion](#) - Groups are assigned to represent specific points of view, and there is a provocateur role to help elicit more questions and thinking, deepening students perspectives
 - In addition, [this podcast episode of Cult of Pedagogy](#) features a wide range of 15 other classroom discussion strategies.
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Informed Action Project Extension: If students are invested and choose to continue the learning, help them to consider how they can use their voice, lived experience, and expertise to extend through civic engagement:

- What might students do with the knowledge and perspective they have acquired?
- How can they continue to learn? Who in your community can talk to students about the work already being done to improve police and community relations?
- Who outside of the school might benefit from their perspective and expertise?
- Reflect on the students and their responses, questions, and actions thus far. What have we learned? What new insights did we gain about our students – who they are, what they care about, and what challenges they face?

Event-specific Resources and Essential Questions to Support Student-Driven Inquiry

In order to support your sunset-driven Social Science inquiries on difficult or controversial current events, the Department of Social Science and Civic Engagement will curate inquiry questions and resources as needed. The sequence of questions/sources are important as they reflect best practices in facilitating discussion of controversial issues. Check back often (here or on the SSCE website) for updated questions and sources as events unfold. Below are resources for various recent events:

- Contact Heather Van Benthuisen, Executive Director of Social Science and Civic Engagement hvanbenthuisen@cps.edu for sources to support inquiries into current events.

Additional Resources for Teacher Preparation

READ and LEARN TOGETHER. When preparing with colleagues, consider using texts like:

- [Teaching Controversy. Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#): by Teaching Tolerance
- [Why We Need Controversy in the Classroom](#)
- [The Case for Contentious Curricula](#)
- [The Political Classroom: How Much is Too Much](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves: [Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations](#)
- [Managing Strong Emotional Reactions](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance Guide on Discussing Race, Racism and Difficult Topics](#)

Consider Organizing An Ethical Dilemma Deliberation: [Harvard's Justice In Schools](#) has a variety of case studies and protocols used to deliberate ethical dilemmas in education with school staff, and develop understanding and shared agreements in supporting students through controversies.

Consider:

- [Controversial Issues Teaching](#)
- [Balancing Inclusivity and Free Speech](#)

Questions or feedback regarding this guidance, please contact lead developer Heather Van Benthuisen, Executive Director of Social Science and Civic Engagement hvanbenthuisen@cps.edu.