House of Commons Debate Lesson

Learning Objective: To prepare and perform a short speech about a key issue from a book

This activity could take place over several lessons and could be carried out when the class is at any point in the book.

*NB: Prior to this activity you may wish to watch videos with the class of Prime Minister’s Questions and look at the conventions of political argumentative writing – i.e. formal tone, commonly-used expressions, use of rhetorical questions, repetition and hyperbole etc.*

1) Teacher presents the motion – parental nudity is just plain wrong.

2) Discuss as a class all of the arguments for and against (e.g. “It’s embarrassing” or “Everyone’s got a body”. List these on the board in two separate columns.

3) Split the class into 2 parties – the Nudey Nude Party for The Abolition of Clothing and The Anti-Nudists. Explain that, in politics, you may disagree with your party’s stance but are forced to “toe the party line” and must still argue for it.

4) Within the two groups, students each take a single argument or reason why the motion is right or wrong. I.e. In the Anti-Nudists, John’s argument might be: “No-one should have to see someone else in the nude.” Helen’s argument could be: “What if your friends came round” etc.

5) The students must then expand their simple argument into a piece of writing 3-5 sentences long which develops their point.

E.g. Helen might write: “Honourable friends, can you possibly imagine the embarrassment that would be suffered by the poor, innocent child of one of these aggressively open nudists? The consequences for his social life would be catastrophic. Unable to have friends round, he’d become lonely, friendless, unsociable. His life could soon spiral out of control.” Etc.

John might write: “Mr Speaker, why on earth must anybody be forced to see another person’s naked flesh? The last thing I wish to look at is somebody else’s revolting, wobbly physique as I go about my daily business. Imagine how uncomfortable public places would become. Right-minded people would be forced to take drastic measures. Imagine a world in which one was forced to wear a blindfold when driving a car. The roads would become bloodbaths. It is time to reject this nonsensical proposal once and for all.

6) Students practise there orations.

7) Organise the classroom with seats facing each other (like the House of Commons). A red stripe could be placed on the floor in front of each of the rows. Establish ground rules. E.g. Heckling is permitted but only *after* someone has spoken and is limited to “hear hear” or “rhubarb”. Heckling must stop when the house is called to order.

8) The teacher (or Speaker), sits at one end, facing along the two lines. When they wish to speak, students stand up. The Speaker invites them to speak in turn and calls the room to order when the “hear-hears” or “rhubarbs” become too loud.

9) Afterwards, there is a secret ballot, in which students are allowed (finally) to dispense with their party position.