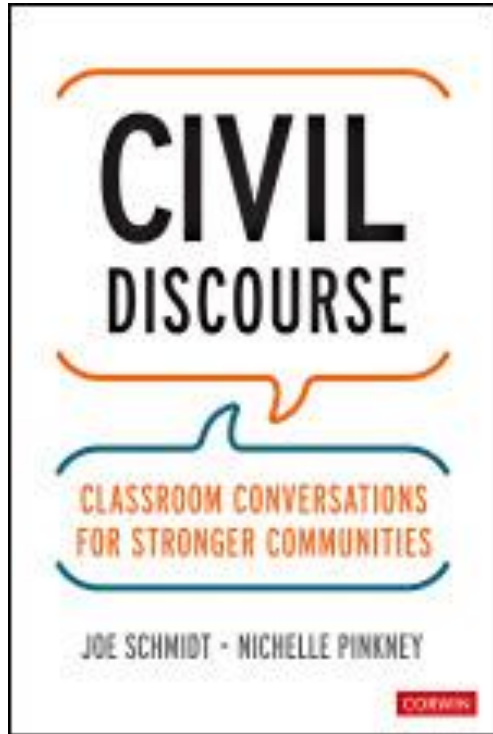


# **Classroom Conversations for Stronger Communities**

# Building Civil Discourse with CUBED



Discomfort lies at the heart of all learning and growth, especially concerning discussions on difficult and complex topics like climate change, slavery, and police brutality. Our work presents ways to help teachers become strong facilitators—not endorsers—of contentious conversations to promote a stronger sense of community.

There are four themes that arise when exploring civil discourse: courage, understanding, belonging, and empathy. Our work is organized around these themes and today's presentation will focus on providing resources for educators to teach the skills of discourse with students.

**Available for order at: [bit.ly/CivilDiscourseText](https://bit.ly/CivilDiscourseText)**

# Presenter and Co-Author



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# CUBED Plan for Growth



*Courage: Why Discomfort Can No Longer Be Avoided*



*Understanding: Gaining Clarity on the Meaning of Terms*



*Belonging: Establishing a Classroom Community*



*Empathy: Preparation with Safe Topics*

**1/2**

*Discourse: Structures for Contentious Topics*

**?**

*Growth: Improving and Expanding Our Impact*

# LIGHTNING ROUND

The text "LIGHTNING ROUND" is rendered in large, bold, yellow 3D block letters. The letters are set against a dark brown background with a subtle lightning bolt graphic. The text is reflected on a glossy surface below it. The overall aesthetic is dramatic and energetic.

*“Part of our job is to teach young people how to talk with one another, especially with people who have differing views.”*

***Dr. Diana Hess***



What are some  
topics in your  
curriculum...

...that some  
might consider  
contentious?

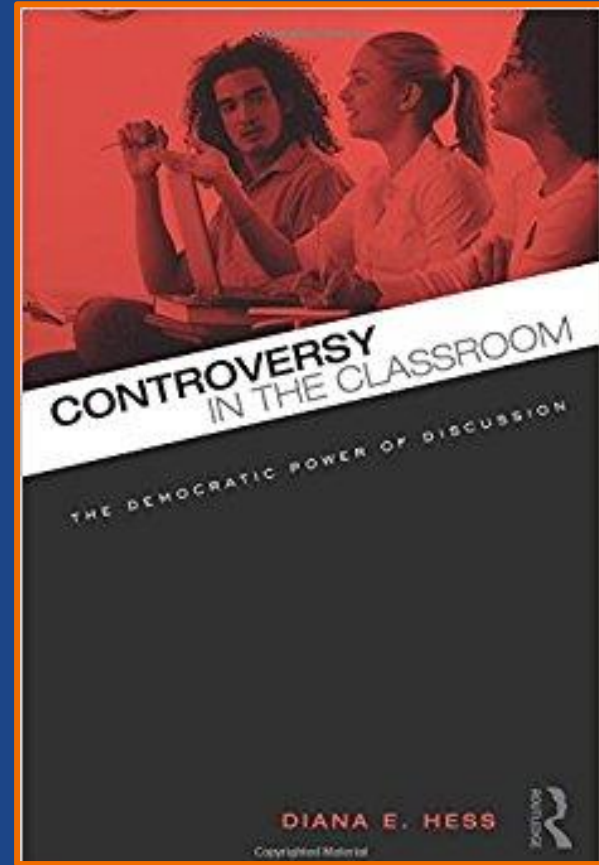
## Possible Topics?

- Tax Policy
- Inflation
- Decision Making
- Safety Net Benefits
- Gas Prices
- Shortages/Hoarding
- International Support
- Student Debt  
Forgiveness

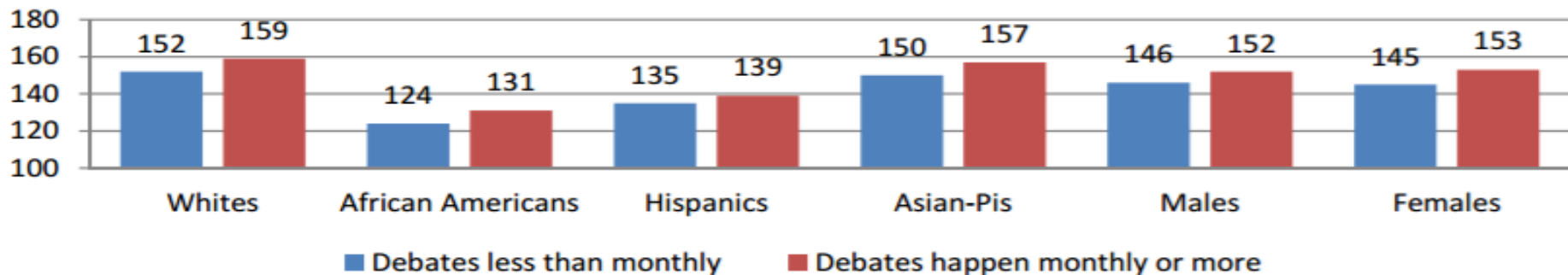


# Controversy in the Classroom

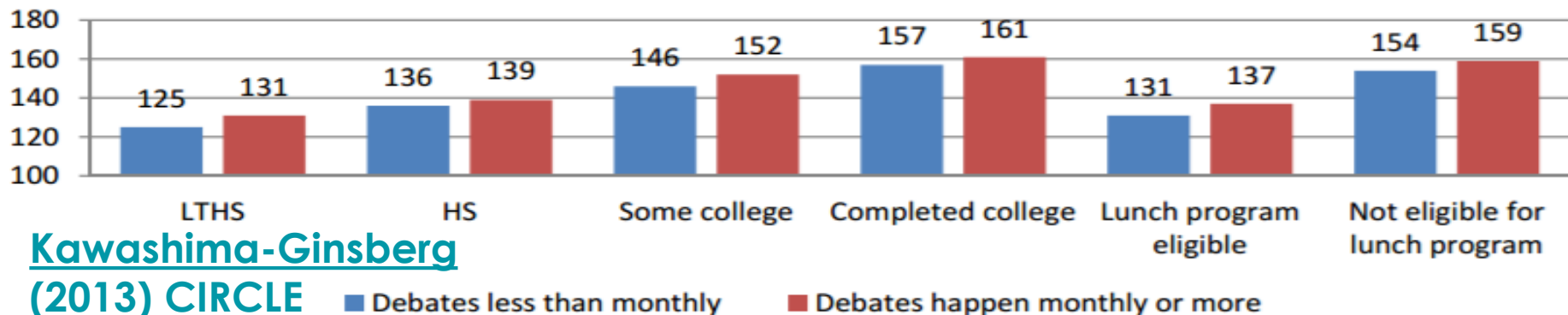
*[S]chools have not just the right, but also the obligation, to create an atmosphere of intellectual and political freedom that uses genuine public controversies to help students discuss and envision political possibilities. Addressing public controversies in schools not only is more educative than quashing or ignoring differences, it also enhances the quality of decision-making by ensuring that multiple and competing views about controversial political issues are aired, fairly considered, and critically evaluated. (pg. 6)*



**12th Grade NAEP Civics Score by Frequency of Debates and Interactive Discussions (2010)**



**12th Grade NAEP Civics Score by Frequency of Debates and Interactive Discussions (2010)**



[Kawashima-Ginsberg](#)  
[\(2013\) CIRCLE](#)

So What's  
The Problem?



# Legal Rulings

Teachers face particular challenges when they are teaching political or controversial topics in classrooms. They must navigate a narrow passage between delivering the curriculum as required by their local board of education and sharing their own personal views and other information, while also abiding by board regulations regarding content and delivery. In addition, they must deliver the curriculum without attempting to indoctrinate students with their own personal beliefs, particularly on religious, political, and controversial topics.

Teachers cannot let their personal beliefs interfere with their obligation to deliver the school's curriculum, and they may not hijack the curriculum or use their position as teacher as an opportunity to inculcate students to their personal beliefs.

# Legal Rulings (cont.)

The school district has the right and responsibility to set the curriculum and, within the delivery of that curriculum, teacher speech can be regulated.

School districts may restrict curricular speech by setting forth what teachers must or may not use as part of delivering the curriculum. While many districts give teachers the latitude to select instructional materials, others require them to abide by rules prescribing or prohibiting certain texts, materials, and instructional techniques. If teachers violate these rules, they may be subject to discipline.

*School Districts Control Teachers' Classroom Speech*

By Julie Underwood

*If we don't actively engage students in contentious conversations that our society is currently struggling with, then what type of citizens are we preparing them to be?*

***If not us...who?  
If not now...when?***

# Where to Begin?

Being here today shows that you have

- ❑ Courage to address these topics and want to growth

so let's start with:

- ❑ Understanding
  - ❑ Gaining Clarity on the Meaning of Terms

“Somehow we  
weathered and  
witnessed a nation  
that isn’t broken,  
but simply  
unfinished”

*Amanda Gorman*  
*The Hill We Climb*





# WORDS

Words have  
direct and  
indirect impacts

# MATTER

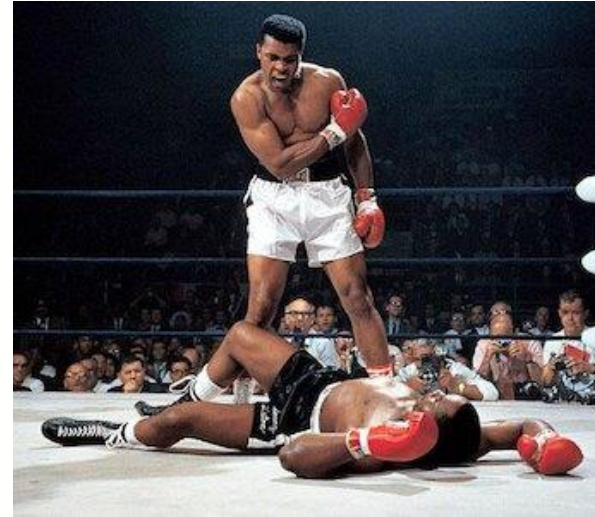
on the people  
who hear or  
read them

# Contentious vs. Controversial

**What's the  
Difference**



# What Is Your Goal?



## The 3Ds of Discourse

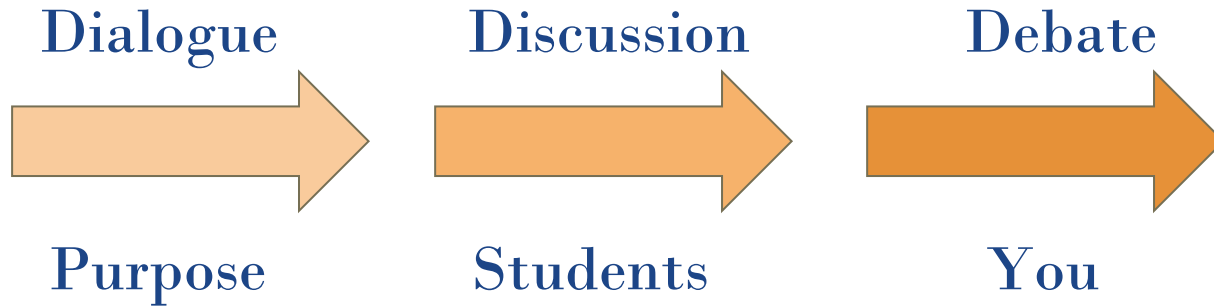
	Dialogue	Discussion	Debate
<b>Purpose</b>	Focused on building understanding of a topic; involves exploring it from many angles, active listening, and considering multiple points of view	Focused on idea exchange; participants may already have positions but are still open to hearing new information to shape their opinions on a topic	Focused on advancing a particular position, persuading, and refuting counter arguments; typically more formal with more advanced preparation
<b>Student's Role</b>	Openly explore the topic, including diverse research sources, actively listening, rephrasing, asking questions, and practicing empathy	Share what they are thinking, including research and reactions as to why one position may be the strongest	Requires advanced preparation usually on a particular outcome or position; actively responding to and refuting counter arguments against their position, and identifying holes in their logic, reasoning, or evidence of opposing positions
<b>Teacher's Role</b>	Model and explicitly teach active listening skills, empathy-building, finding common ground, and considering topics from multiple angles. Prompt students to consider the effects of the topic on multiple stakeholders	Encourage participation from all students, model and explicitly teach source analysis and reasoning skills, and prompt students to summarize each other's points and ask clarifying questions of each other's positions	Craft or guide students to craft the formal motion for debate, explicitly teaching argument and counter argument skills; often serves as the judge of who had the strongest argument based on neutral criteria such as sound logic and evidence
<b>Things to Consider</b>	Dialogue is often best suited for topics where students are still learning about all of the angles and nuance is involved or for topics where emotions run high, so that there is a focus on the goal of understanding rather than identifying winning arguments and losing arguments	Discussion is best suited for conversations around policy topics where students have some background knowledge and opinions but also want to learn more and consider different ways to approach the topic	Debate is often best suited for explicitly teaching persuasion skills and is best for topics where emotions do not run high and when students are assigned the sides randomly or take both positions rather than only sticking with their existing positions

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# Progressing from Sharing to Decision Making

Think about a contentious topic that you will teach about this year. How can this topic be structured to happen with classroom:



When planning keep in mind why you are doing it, what the students are doing, and what is your role.

# Building Community

Once you have an understanding of key terms, building a shared understanding across teams, grades, and building is the next step.

- ❑ **Belonging:**

- ❑ Establishing a Classroom Community

- ❑ 3Ps - Protocols, Policies, Procedures

## 3 P's

Protocols, Policies, and Procedures will help provide expectations and guidance for your students to keep the classroom a safe space. They will be your safety net to refer back to when things might go wrong.



# Protocols



A protocol is a written plan that specifies procedures to be followed in defined situations. Some of your procedures are for events that you prepare for your class, but what about the things you can't plan for?



# Protocols

Before the first day of school have a plan for what to do when the unplanned happens:

- The “unrelated” question about a tough topic
- An inappropriate comment or thought
- Sensitive information that is shared

You don't know when or what, but have a plan for **HOW** you will redirect and address with student(s) at the appropriate time.

# Reflection Prompts to Guide You

- What are your classroom rules and expectations?
  - How are they decided?
  - Who is involved?
- What do you do with them?
  - Are they present daily?
  - How are they reinforced?
- How are families involved?
- What are YOU sharing?

# Policies - Day One

Policies are the classroom rules that govern how the class runs and students interact on a day to day basis.

This work includes some pre-planning, but a lot of it is done **WITH** the students.

# Procedures - Planning Ahead

A procedure is a set of instructions that describe the approved and recommended steps of a particular act or sequence of events.

You will use classroom time to model procedures for your students and support students practicing them. This will be discussed later in the presentation.

# Empathy through Skills & Practice

- ❑ Building a foundation of a strong community sets the stage for working on student empathy by identifying the essential skills of civil discourse and providing a space for students to practice:
- ❑ Empathy:
  - ❑ Preparation with Safe Topics

**LET'S START AT THE VERY  
BEGINNING....**



**A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START!**

makeameme.org

# Family & Admin Support

Keep administration in the know so that they are not caught off guard

Clear and consistent communication with families

Identify the skills and focus on the development of those skills

Students are reminded of expectations and practice them



Scaffolding the Skills



# Batter Up!



Slow Pitch....



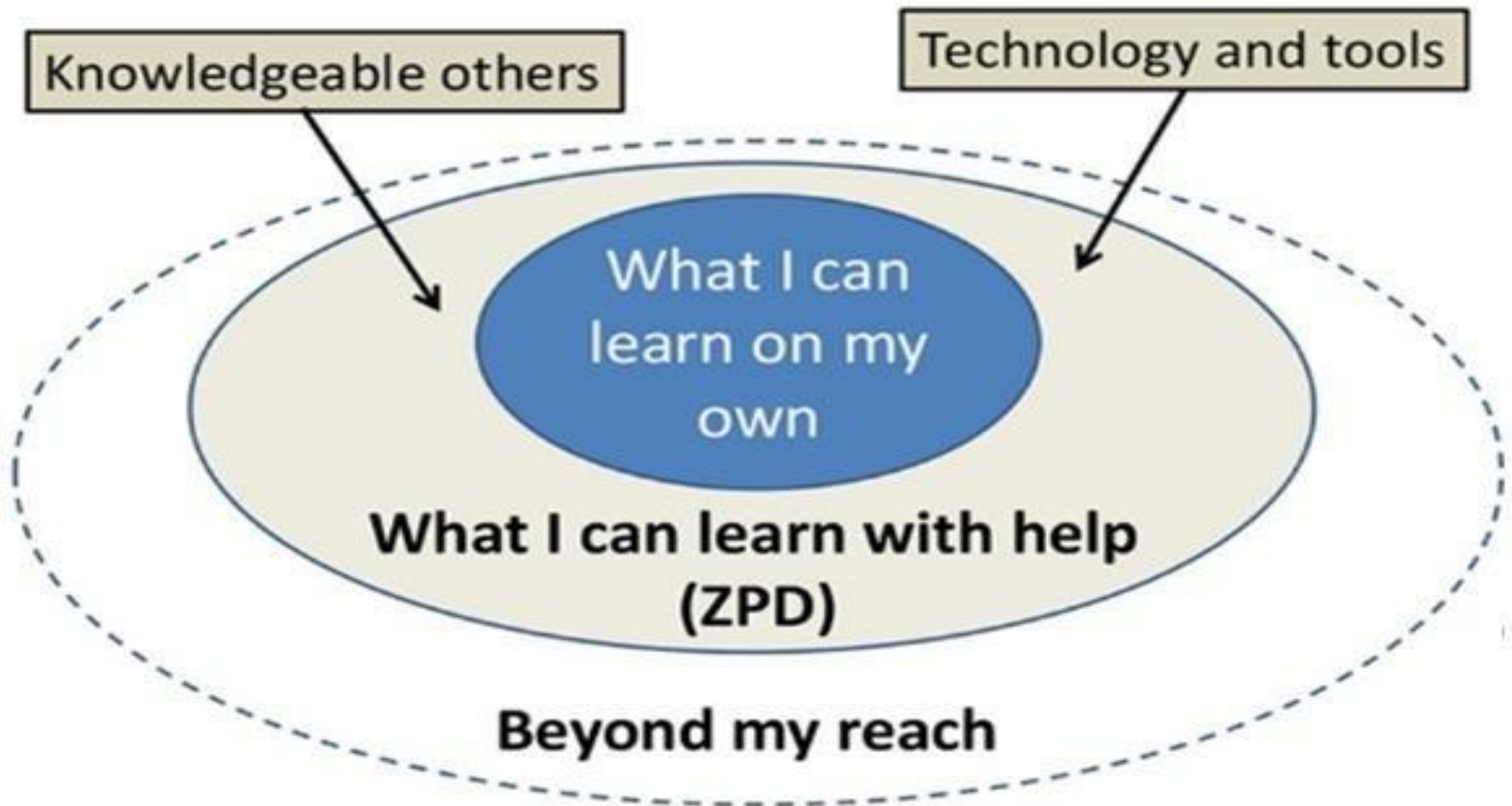
Knowledgeable others

Technology and tools

What I can  
learn on my  
own

What I can learn with help  
(ZPD)

Beyond my reach



# Planning for Tomorrow Today

The skills and topics are the base of your long term planning toward your most contentious topics.

Things to consider:

- Building background knowledge
- F.O.G. Checks
- LET'S ACT
- Argument Mapping




# FOG Checks: More than a worksheet!


Have your students practice “clearing the FOG” whenever there is a possible confusion about a statement.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/chunk/fo-analysis>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

 FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

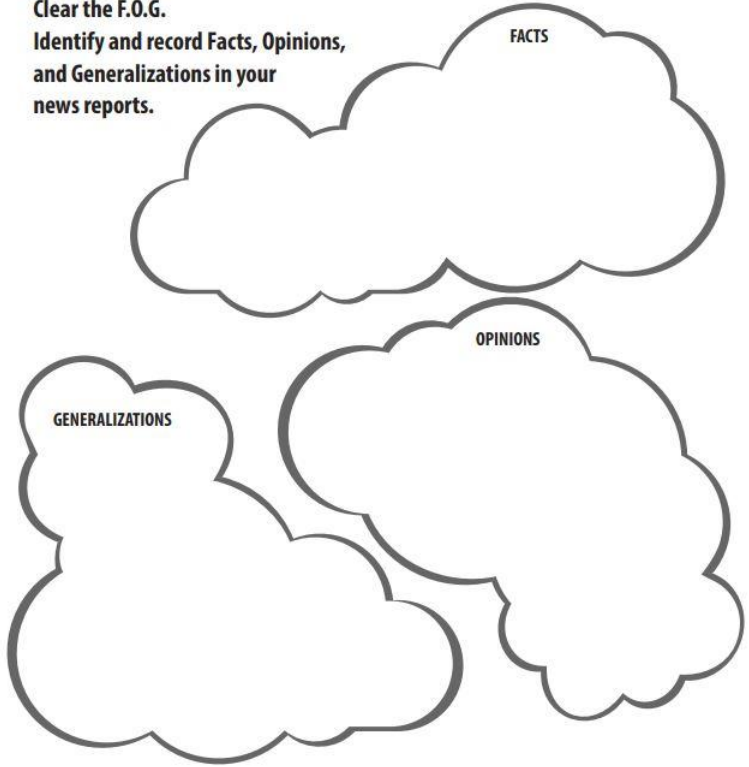
 the news literacy project  
How to know what to believe

---

**F.O.G. Analysis** Lesson 4: How Journalists Minimize Bias

---

**Clear the F.O.G.**  
Identify and record Facts, Opinions, and Generalizations in your news reports.



FACTS

GENERALIZATIONS

OPINIONS

# LETS ACT

**A Framework for Teaching Controversial Current Events**

**L**ISTEN - **E**DUCATE - **T**ALK - **S**EARCH  
**A**NALYZE - **C**ONCLUDE - **T**AKE ACTION

<http://www.genevievecaffrey.com/lets-act.html>

<b>Listen</b>	Listen to student prior knowledge through surveys, reflective essays, KWL charts, etc.)
<b>Educate</b>	Do a vocabulary activity and give background knowledge using videos, news articles, photographs, etc.
<b>Talk</b>	Facilitate an activity that allows students to talk in small groups in a way that allows them to discuss the issues, but does not force them to take a position. (ie., categorize perspectives along a spectrum)
<b>Search</b>	Search within (reflect) and search the world (inquire) about the event and issue. Design an inquiry-based project to search for answers to your questions and solutions to problems.
<b>Analyze</b>	Go deeper through Children's Literature, Historical Analysis, Systems Thinking, Political Cartoons, Role play, etc. Continue to work on inquiry-based project.
<b>Conclude</b>	Facilitate a deliberation activity in which students prepare statements in response to a proposed question (ie, Should Kaepernick be suspended for kneeling during the national anthem?) Deliberate and then vote.
<b>Take Action</b>	Create an assignment or opportunity for students to take action (ie, options: persuasive essay, Letter to the Editor, create a short film, make a podcast, make a panel or artifact for a museum exhibit, write a speech, organize an awareness campaign, protest, fundraiser, etc.)



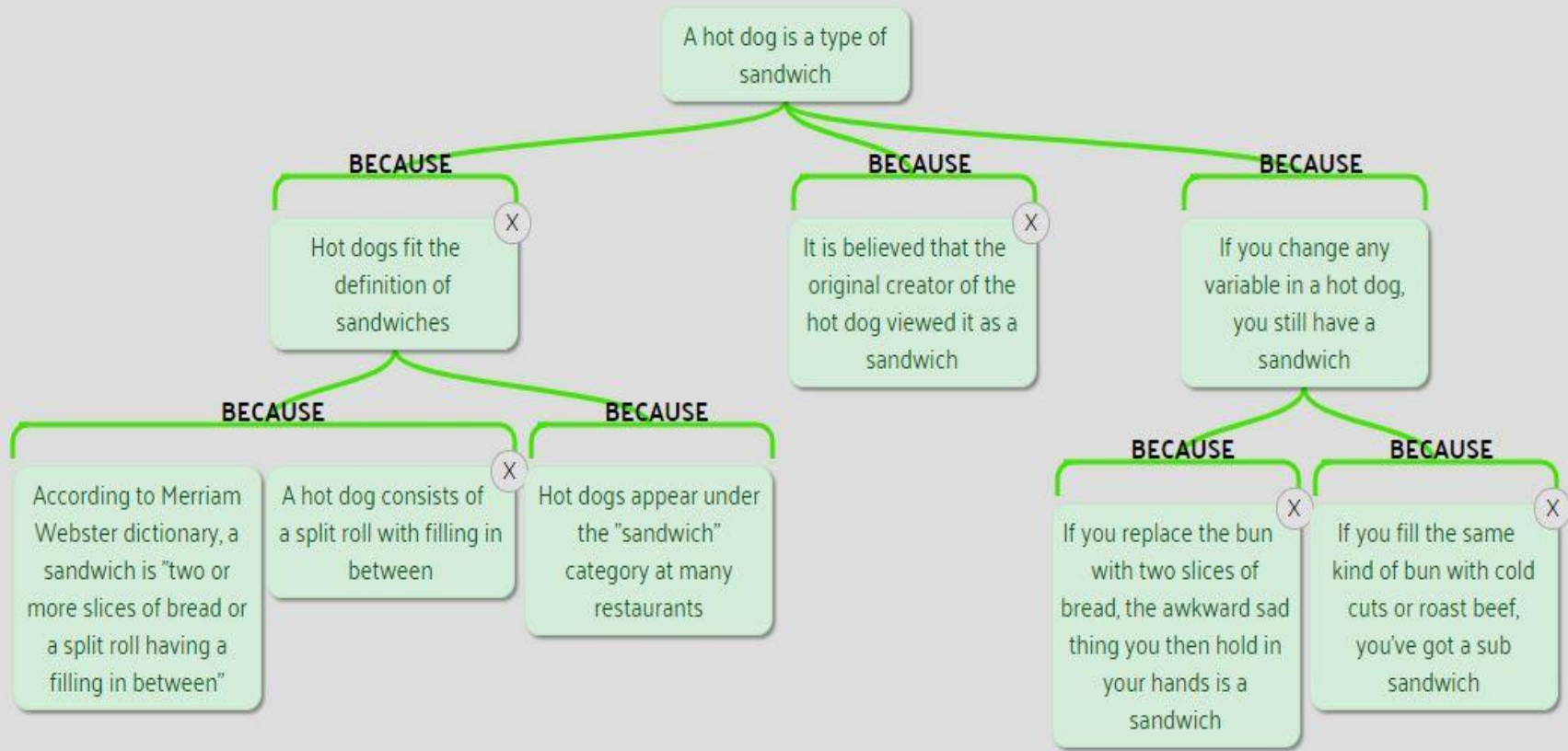
Is a hot dog a sandwich?



PRO side puzzle >

CON side puzzle >

<https://thinkeranalytix.org/>



## Pro/Con Puzzles & Student Courses

# Day of Discourse

- ❑ Once students have shown that they have the “procedural knowledge” to engage in contentious topics, it is time for contentious topics to be addressed in your classroom.
- ❑ **Discourse:**
  - ❑ Structures for Contentious Topics

# GUIDE Elements

**Guiding Question:** An overarching question that provides a focus for discourse.

**Uninterrupted Thinking Time:** Students should be given individual time to think about the guiding question.

**Information Provided:** Provide unbiased, concise information on the general topic such as charts, data, infographics, short summaries, or video clips.

**Dedicated Q & A Time:** Give students time to ask clarifying questions before the discourse begins.

**Exit Opportunity:** Students need to know that if a topic or question is just “too much” that they can opt out.

# Emperical



# Policy



# “Day of” Structures & Activities

What are your “go to” strategies?

- Structured Academic Controversy
- Socratic Seminars
- Philosophical Chairs
- Fishbowl
- Pinwheel Perspective Taking
- Gallery Walks

What's the bottom  
line?



# Give Them a Chance

Students need opportunities to make reasoned arguments with scaffolded practice.

- Our book has a companion site of resources.
- My website has a blog post with resources: [Courageous Conversations about Contentious Topics](#)
- Learning for Justice has a middle school lesson called [Civil Discourse In The Classroom](#).
- Facing History and Ourselves has several ways for students to share ideas in their [Fostering Civil Discourse - A Guide for Classroom Conversations](#).



# Keep the Big Picture in Mind

- ❑ This cannot be avoided any longer
- ❑ Spread pockets of excellence
- ❑ Curriculum needs to support educators
- ❑ Real progress will be long term
- ❑ 80/20 rule for moving forward with next steps



NEXT STEPS



# Things to consider

Where is your school in the triangle?

What students are doing in the classroom is only part of the bigger picture.

- Classroom Content
- Curriculum Review
- Diverse Books
- Self, Student, and Staff Reflection
- Courageous Conversations

# Before I go...

If you are interested in taking the next steps in your classroom curriculum or if you have questions about anything you heard about today, please reach out to me at [joeschmidtsocialstudies.com](http://joeschmidtsocialstudies.com) which includes a form for PD support or @madisonteacher on Twitter.

For more info and to receive a copy of the presentation sign up for our newsletter:

<https://bit.ly/Discourse4EduNewsletter>