

Teaching the Core Democratic Values

Essays & debates

- Have students write a persuasive essay taking a stand on one of the issues below and using core democratic values in his or her arguments. Make it clear that they should not only defend their position, but tell why they are rejecting the other side of the issue.
- Select an issue from the same set of questions below and have the class debate it using the core democratic values in their arguments.

Issues: What do you think? What do our core values say about it?

1. Should a high school have coeducational sports teams?
2. Should a student have the right to use offensive language in the classroom?
3. Should schools require students to wear uniforms?
4. A school has scheduled a singer to perform at a school assembly. Some people are protesting because the performer is said to be gay. Should the assembly be cancelled?
5. Should we stop buying a certain brand of clothes if we find they are made by child laborers in another country?
6. One of your friends who is very nice to you treats kids from poor homes very rudely. Should you try to stop this rude behavior when you are with this friend?
7. Should you report a classmate who you know has stolen money from the teacher's desk?
8. Should you refuse to vote when you strongly disagree with both candidates who are running for office?
9. One of your classmates who is black wants to form a group to help black students be proud of their African heritage. Should the group be allowed to exclude non-black persons?
10. A boy in front of you at the movie behaves badly the whole time and torments another boy sitting near him. When the movie is over you notice that a small roll of bills has slipped out of the bully's pocket and remains on his seat. Should you catch up with the bully and return his money or do something worthwhile with the lost money, such as giving it to the boy who was picked on?

Write a biography

Have students choose someone who fought for one or more of America's core democratic values and write a report on this person. Be sure the report focuses on the action he or she took to support a value.

Posters

Have students choose a core democratic value and make a poster that includes the following:

- The student's own definition of the value
- An example of this value in action
- The student's own symbol or icon of this value

Current event

Create a bulletin board that focuses on a specific core democratic value. Have students bring in examples from newspapers and magazines that are related to this value. Discuss the articles and have students highlight sentences or sections that are particularly relevant to the core value. After a period of time, such as a month, you may want to change the board to focus on another core value.

Classroom chart

Have students brainstorm ways that core democratic values can be put into practice at your school. Make a chart of the values and ideas and post it in the hall. You may want to challenge other classes to put core values to work.

Quotations

Make a chart or poster of quotations students find in their daily reading that pertain to the core democratic values.

Organizations

Have students make a list of organizations (and their addresses) that fight for equality and fairness, such as the NAACP or NOW. Write letters to these organizations asking for information about their work, or find out about them using the internet.

Creative writing

Use the core democratic values as themes and topics for any creative writing assignments you might give your students.

Cartoons

Political cartoons as well as some comics (i.e. *Peanuts*) often have core values as a topic. Have students collect cartoons and comics that are relevant to your study and make a classroom display. Be sure to have students link them to specific core values.

Take a stand

Have students choose a local issue that involves a core democratic value and take a stand on it. Have them write a letter to a newspaper supporting their position.

Source: **Our Core Democratic Values—Civic Virtue in Action**
by Jean Schäfer, Ph.D. — River Road Publications