*Civics Career Academy Support Lesson*

**Title**

Rules to the Game: Civil Argument & Logical Fallacies

*A Lesson for Civics Career Academy Course ‘Public Service Communication*

***Course***

**Public Service Communication**

***Benchmark***

| SS.912.CG.2.11 | Evaluate political communication for bias, factual accuracy, omission and emotional appeal. |
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| ELA.K12.EE.4.1 | Use appropriate collaborative techniques and active listening skills when engaging in discussions in a variety of situations. |
| 09.04 | Experience communication and collaboration through active participation in the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative and through effective public service communication. |
| 11.01 | Explain how public opinion shapes personal opinion and how civic participation can influence election outcomes. |
| SS.912.CG.2.2 | Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States’ constitutional republic. |
| SS.912.CG.2.3 | Explain the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state and national levels. |

***Course Unit*UNIT 4**

***Lesson Foci***

* Define “civil debate”, with an emphasis on the civility piece
* Identify logical fallacies and how they undermine civility of debate­­
* Evaluate rhetorical examples for logical fallacies
* Contrast the short term and long term effectiveness of uncivil discourse with civil discourse
* Hypothesize the long term effectiveness of uncivil discourse with civil discourse on small groups (teams/projects) and large groups (organizations/governments)

***Teacher Note***

**Students should be relatively familiar with these terms and their implications prior to the lesson:**

* **Civil debate - a form of discussion or argumentation where participants engage in a respectful, constructive, and courteous manner while expressing and defending their viewpoints on a particular issue**
* **Rhetoric - the art of communication, influence, argument, and persuasion**
* **Rhetorical strategies: a planned and deliberate use of persuasive techniques and language choices to effectively communicate a message, influence an audience's emotions, beliefs, or actions, and achieve a specific purpose or goal**

***Activity Vocabulary***

* Fallacy: defects that weaken arguments, and deceive audiences; they are generally emotional appeals or fallacies of logic
* Appeal to fear: attempting to create support for an idea by increasing fear towards an alternative
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* Appeal to nature: because something is “natural” it is inherently good for you or better
* Ad Hominem: an attack on an opponent’s character or personal traits to undermine their argument

Example: During a presidential debate, Candidate A attacks Candidate B's personal character instead of addressing their policies. "Candidate B cannot be trusted because they have a history of failed business ventures."

* Strawman: a diversionary tactic in which one distorts an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack, defeats the new pretend argument, then claims victory over the real argument

Example: In a political advertisement, a candidate misrepresents their opponent's stance on an issue to make it easier to attack. "My opponent wants to abolish all taxes, leaving our country without any funding for essential services."

* Slippery Slope: an argument that suggests taking a minor action will lead to major and sometimes ludicrous consequences. (if A happens, then B will happen therefore A cannot happen)

Example: In a debate, a candidate argues that implementing a specific policy will lead to disastrous consequences without sufficient evidence. "If we pass this law, it will destroy the economy, and our country will face complete financial ruin."

* False Dichotomy: When only two choices are presented yet more exist, or a spectrum of possible choices exists between two extremes; presented as an either/or choice

Example: A candidate presents a complex issue as having only two possible solutions, ignoring other potential options. "Either we completely ban all immigration, or we risk losing our jobs and identity as a nation."

* Bandwagon: appeal to popularity as an attempted form of validation i.e. “everyone is doing it”

Example: A political advertisement claims that everyone is supporting a particular candidate, implying that viewers should do the same to be part of the majority. "Join the millions who have already decided to vote for Candidate Y!"

* Appeal to Authority: because information came from an authority figure, it must be true

Example: During a debate, a candidate uses a celebrity endorsement as evidence to support their argument on a political issue. "As Oprah said, Candidate Z is the best choice for our country!"

* Begging the Question (Circular Reasoning): a type of circular argument in which the conclusion is included in the premise of the argument.

Example: A candidate asserts a claim without providing evidence, assuming that claim is already true. "Candidate C is the best choice because they are clearly the most qualified candidate."

* False Cause: the link between premises and conclusion depends on some imagined causal connection that probably does not exist

Example: A political ad attributes an improvement in the economy to a specific candidate's policies without considering other contributing factors. "Since Candidate W took office, the stock market has surged, proving their economic prowess."

**Authorship  
Isaiah Blue, Polk**

**Laura Brimer, Polk**

**Lynnette Drayton, Broward**

***Lesson Steps***

1. **Lead a discussion** about the importance of civil debate in functioning teams, projects, organizations, and/or governments. Invite students to give examples of what civility looks like when individuals disagree. Some salient points should be:
   1. Civil debate is necessary to a functioning team, project, organization, and/or government as it promotes: diverse perspectives, critical thinking, enhanced decision-making, conflict resolution, public engagement, education, trust and legitimacy, and innovation
   2. It is natural for there to be disagreement. Forums for appropriate disagreement can help teams, projects, organizations, and/or governments to function more effectively.
2. **Contrast** civil debate with uncivil debate as a whole group. Invite students to give examples of uncivil behavior in debate. Encourage examples. Jot these on the board or on chart paper for the entire group to see.
3. **Introduce** students to fallacious arguments and tie the formal definitions to the examples they discussed as a class.
   1. Emphasize that recognizing and avoiding logical fallacies is essential for promoting respectful and persuasive communication.
4. **Break students into small groups (minimum 3/group).** Assign each group an attack advertisement from [Museum of the Moving Image’s “The Living Room Candidate”](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/). Have each group identify what fallacious arguments are in the advertisement, then share their findings with the class.
5. **Role-Playing Exercise.** 
   1. In the same small groups, assign the role of “Debater A”, “Debater B”, and timekeeper. (If groups have more than three participants, the timekeeper role can be split into two: timekeeper and scribe)
   2. Provide a scenario where three students engage in a discussion or debate. Example scenarios are: “peanut butter is better than jelly”, or “cats rule and dogs drool”.
   3. Debaters will have 1-2 minutes to use as many logical fallacies as possible to make their argument.
   4. The timekeeper’s task is to stop debaters from going overtime or interrupting, and use tally marks to recognize and point out any logical fallacies used by the debate participants.
   5. The debater who uses the most logical fallacies wins.
6. **Reflection.** After the role-play, have a short debriefing session to discuss the importance of recognizing fallacies in civil debates. Discuss the long term effectiveness of uncivil discourse with civil discourse on small groups (teams/projects) and large groups (organizations/governments)

**Enrichment Suggestion #1 -**

*Have students compare and contrast the relative civility of the public debates of Brutus vs Hamilton to the insult-driven election of 1800, and discuss the longterm and shortterm implications.*

**Enrichment Suggestion #2 -**

*Assign students a debate task where they must present their arguments while avoiding logical fallacies.*

**Teacher Background Information**

1. **Be familiar with logical fallacies**
   1. [**Source 1**](https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/)
2. **Be familiar with the Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist debates between Hamilton, Madison, & Jay against the writings of “Brutus”.** 
   1. [**Source 1**](https://docs-of-freedom.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/attachment/440/Brutus_No_1_Excerpts_Annotated_Proof_3__1_.pdf)
   2. [**Source 2**](https://archive.csac.history.wisc.edu/A_Citizen_of_Philadelphia.pdf)
3. **Be familiar with the election of 1800**
   1. [**Source 1**](https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/on-this-day-the-first-bitter-contested-presidential-election-takes-place)
   2. [**Source 2**](https://daily.jstor.org/first-ugly-election-america-1800/)
   3. [**Source 3**](https://safeshare.tv/x/ss661d7801ac8dc#edit)