Teaching Students to Discuss

Teacher Notes

We all know the importance of collaboration and discussion, but how do we teach our students to engage in considerate, meaningful ways? In these two lessons from Teaching Tolerance, students reflect on how to best communicate in group settings, preparing them to effectively participate in a democratic classroom.

The first lesson, Ground Rules for Discussion, is approximately 50 minutes long. In this lesson, students brainstorm the qualities of a good discussion then work in small groups to create ground rules for class discussions. After each group presents their rules to the class, the top ten rules are displayed to guide discussions throughout the year.

The complete lesson plan is available at <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/ground-rules-discussion>.

The second lesson, Speaking Kindness in Democratic Classrooms, focuses more on the language used in discussions. In this 50-minute lesson, students list ways they like to be spoken to then use their lists to create action statements that are displayed in the classroom.

The complete lesson plan is available at <http://www.tolerance.org/speaking-kindness>.

Though some classes would benefit from both lessons, elements of the second lesson could be incorporated in the first to save instructional time.

After the lesson, engage students in either a large group or small group discussion to practice. Topics should be related to what is currently being studied in the classroom.