SPAR (from FacingHistory.org)

**Rationale** SPAR is an event in forensic competitions around the country. In this structured debate, students have to frame an argument in one minute and then react quickly to their opponents’ ideas.  This strategy helps students practice using evidence and examples to defend a position. Because students are not given much preparation time, SPAR is most effective when students already have background information about the topic.

**Procedure**

**Step one: Preparation** Divide class in half. Assign one side to be the *pro* position and the other side to be the *con* position. Have students move their desks so they are sitting opposite an opponent.  Write a debatable proposition on the board (e.g. “It is always best to use nonviolent methods to achieve greater civil rights” or “After conflicts and violence, restorative justice is better tool for rebuilding society than retributive justice”). The proposition should relate to material you have been studying and students should already have some background information on the issue.

**Step two: Brainstorm arguments** Give students 1-2 minutes to write down their arguments and evidence for or against the proposition. You can give the students a graphic organizer to help them structure their ideas and take notes during the debate.  **Step three: Opening statements**

*Pro*-students present a 1-minute opening statement making their case while the *Con*-students listen quietly and take notes. Then, the *Con*-students present a 1-minute opening statement, while the *Pro*-students listen quietly and take notes

**Step four: Discussion** Give students 30-seconds to prepare ideas for what they want to say to their opponent. Invite the two students to engage in a 3 minute discussion during which they may question their opponent’s reasoning or examples or put forth new ones of their own.

**Step five: Closing statements** Give students 30 seconds or 1 minute to prepare a closing statement. *Con-*students present a closing statement for 1 minute, while the *Pro*-student listens quietly, and then the roles reverse.

**Step six:** **Debrief the activity.** Prompts you can use to structure a class discussion about this activity include:

* What did you learn from doing this SPAR debate?
* What were the arguments for or against the issue?
* What value is to be gained by students arguing positions with which they don't necessarily agree?
* What was hardest about doing this type of debate? What did the students like about it?  Should the format of the debate be adjusted? If so, in what ways?

Before facilitating a class discussion about any of these questions, give students the opportunity to respond to them in their journals.

**Variations**

* **Research SPAR:** SPAR can be modified to include time for students to gather more evidence to support their positions. Research can be as informal as giving students time to look through their notes (possibly as a homework assignment the night before) or can be as extensive as a formal research project.
* **Jigsaw SPAR:** Students can first meet as “expert” *Pro* and *Con* groups (pairs of triads) to develop ideas together before beginning the debate.
* **Fishbowl SPAR:** Half the class can do the debate while the other half of the class observes.