**Assessment Task for Speaking**

**Topic: To Debate or Not to Debate**

This assessment task focuses on developing senior secondary students’ speaking skills.

This set of materials consists of Question Paper and Suggested Answers.

**Speaking Task: To Debate or Not to Debate**

**Situation:**

You are a university student. Recently, you have applied for the post of part-time tutor who will run an after-school debate programme in a secondary school. Shortlisted for an interview, you are given the following speaking task as part of the screening process.

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| --- | --- |
| The following is a letter from a concerned parent.   |  | | --- | | Dear Sir,  I was surprised and disappointed to learn that my daughter would be taking part in an after-school debate programme. This is not a good idea. Debating is out of touch with the modern world. No one holds debates in modern workplaces. Also, debates are very formal; it would be far more useful to teach students correct conversational English, instead of having them argue against their true beliefs, which is silly. In preparing for a debate, you also have to find out all sorts of information not related to English learning. The time would be better spent on English grammar. Finally, standing up and speaking in front of others is stressful. That cannot be good for young people.  I am not against the idea of having students participate in after-school programmes, but debating does not seem to be the right focus.  Yours faithfully,  Thomas Han |   **Part A: Group Interaction**  You and other candidates are trying to come up with some ideas about how to respond to the parent.  You may want to talk about:   * whether the parent’s points are reasonable * what points you might make against the parent’s opinions * good points about using debating as a way to learn English * anything else you think is important   **Part B: Individual Response**  In order to help parents better understand the role of debating in student learning, it is decided that a page should be set up on the school website for debaters to share their experience. Answer the following question to start brainstorming ideas.   1. Do you like debating? 2. What do you find difficult about debating? 3. What qualities does a good debater need? 4. What sort of topics do you like to debate? |

**END OF QUESTION PAPER**

**Suggested Ideas for Group Interaction and Individual Response**

**Part A Group Discussion**

* **whether the parents’ points are reasonable**

*In favour of the parent’s opinion:*

* Debating is not something young people are used to; it does feel rather unnatural.
* Debating involves a higher level of English than many secondary students have attained.
* Shyer students do not enjoy debating.
* It is difficult in debates to involve everyone to the same degree.

*Against the parent’s opinion:*

* Debating is fun.
* Debating involves cooperation and teamwork.
* Debating prepares students for the many types of public speaking demanded by most professions nowadays.
* Debating improves analytical skills.
* Debating involves good training in information gathering.
* Debaters need to speak clearly.
* Debaters need to listen carefully.
* Debaters need a wide and varied vocabulary and will gain it while researching different topics.
* Debaters need to take notes.
* Debaters need to think quickly.
* Debaters need to work under pressure.
* Debating teaches one to be calm and rational.
* Debating trains one to consider both sides of a question.
* Debating helps develop one’s moral values.
* **what points you might make against the parent’s opinions**
* Looking at various aspects of a question, discussing it and trying to decide what is best is one of the most basic processes in the modern world.
* Learning to speak before others in a confident and communicative way is an essential skill for success.
* Being persuasive is a valuable social and business skill.
* Some students might be nervous and shy, but education is about changing people. They are the ones who especially need practice to help them become self-assured.
* Senior students should be able to use different types of English. The more formal varieties are just as important as the more casual.
* Learning to see other people’s points of view is essential for a tolerant society.
* Being able to argue without losing one’s temper is a sign of being civilised.
* Teenagers are often still at the stage of working out their own views. Some role playing is a good method.
* Language experts agree the best way of learning a language is using it to perform tasks and take part in activities; and not spending a lot of time learning formal rules.
* **good points about using debating as a way to learn English**
* To participate properly in a debate one needs to read extensively (to locate sources and see what they have to offer) and intensively to understand arguments and find detailed evidence.
* Debaters need to speak spontaneously when answering questions or offering rebuttal. They need to speak clearly and with correct pronunciation.
* Debaters need to listen to their opponents so as to be ready to answer any unexpected points.
* Preparing the first draft of a debate speech will probably involve writing skills.
* Teachers can plan their students’ vocabulary development by choosing suitable topics.
* Debating is a communicative activity which promotes learning by participating in a genuine language-use situation.
* **anything else you think is important**
* Debates can be used to further other parts of the curriculum (e.g. moral and civic education).
* Debating appeals to people’s competitive spirit.

**Part B Individual Response**

1. Do you like debating?

*At the beginning I wasn’t at all sure I could speak clearly enough or think quickly enough to answer questions and deal with the other side’s points. And I knew I would be very nervous standing up and talking in front of everyone in the class. Of course, I did it a few times but I didn’t enjoy it. I got through many small, easy speaking exercises before getting to a full debate. Week by week I grew more confident and began to enjoy debating. The best of all was when my friends and I formed teams. My team really had a good spirit. We spent lots of time together working on our debate. Everyone was so cooperative and it really was a good experience. So now when you ask me if I like debating, I can answer without any trouble: yes, I do.*

1. What do you find difficult about debating?

*To be honest, nearly everything. When I am given a topic which I never seem to know much about, I must do a lot of research, and that means I have to read a lot of new words and that takes a lot of time and I am always using the dictionary. Gradually I get to know the words, but of course I’ve got to know how to say them aloud too. I try hard but my teammates often have to correct me. Luckily they are very kind and patient, but they often have to ask me what I mean or tell me to speak louder. Then there are my arguments. They seem good to me, but when I explain them to the others they always seem to be able to find problems with them. I cannot think of answers to what they say and feel foolish. So it is all hard, but I am a positive person and I know I am improving. No pain, no gain, I guess.*

1. What qualities does a good debater need?

*Debating is a good way to learn because it involves so many qualities. First of all, there are intellectual qualities. A good debater must be able to think analytically and see what general issues lie under particular ones. For example, banning something harmful to health sounds sensible, but do we want governments to decide what is best for us? Must we all want to live as long as possible? And is it a good use of public money to enforce the ban? Then once the arguments have been analysed you have to present them logically and in a clear organised way. Next, you need language skills like good vocabulary, clear and correctly pronounced speech and the ability to persuade and convince. Third there come more physical qualities such as good body language, a confident relaxed style of standing and looking at people. I think those are the three big areas.*

1. What sort of topics do you like to debate?

*I suppose I quite like moral issues – maybe because I think they are important. Is war ever right? Do people have the right to decide when they want to die? Do people have to look after their parents even if they don’t like them and they aren’t really very nice? Questions like that are interesting, although I am not sure there are any good answers. I find social issues rather dull unless they are very precise. We had a very good debate about a government plan to build a third runway at the airport. I could see different points of view and understand the multifaceted impact of the plan. How can I sum that up? I think I like the big, big questions and then the small, exact ones.*

**END OF SUGGESTED ANSWERS**