



## Language Arts Assessment Activity #10:

### *Debating Hot Topics*

#### **Introduction**

The Roman forum (pictured above as it looks today in ruins) was the meeting place of Roman citizens to debate the issues of war and peace, of crime and punishment, of law and order. Great speakers, called orators, gathered crowds around them as they posed questions for debate. Who should be allowed to be a citizen? Was citizenship the right of everyone who lived within the empire? Certainly not! Then who could have the protection of Roman law, the right to vote and hold office? Just as Americans debate the rights of immigrants to enter the U.S., hold jobs, receive welfare, and educate their children in our schools, so the Romans debated such issues. Today when we speak of a “forum” on issues, we refer to a public debate, such as that held in the heart of that great ancient civilization that surrounded the entire Mediterranean Sea.

No major nation provided its citizens such a voice in public affairs after the fall of Rome in the fifth century A.D., until the United States declared its independence in 1776. The survival of democracy depends on an educated, involved citizenry committed to seeking the truth. Over many centuries millions have died because they dared to debate what was true and right.

#### **In this assessment activity, you will:**

- Write a detailed outline of your five-minute speech for the first round of the debate.
- Participate in a debate of an assigned topic, including a rebuttal of your opponent’s speech.

#### **LA Skills and Knowledge Assessed:**

- ❖ Oral persuasion, responsiveness to an audience, incorporating information gained from listening to adjust message
- ❖ Research a topic and organize material for easy access when debating
- ❖ Use of logic and evidence as the foundation of civil discourse
- ❖ Speaking on demand in rebutting arguments and evidence raised in the context of debate

## Part I: Research and Writing

**Write an outline of your opening speech:** You are to prepare an outline of your speech in the affirmative or the negative on a selected topic. The speech must not exceed 5 minutes. You may present evidence in the form of still photographs, diagrams, video excerpts, and other visual forms of information. All sources must be properly cited in the outline as well as referred to in the oral debate. In preparation for a debate, your teacher will guide you through the following process:

1. Form a team to debate the issue under consideration. The team can either be 4 people with 2 in the affirmative and two in the negative, or only 2 people with one on either side of the question under debate.
2. Phrase the question to be debated into a call for action that has a clear affirmative and a negative side.

Examples: "Should the United States Interior Department reintroduce wolves into national parks and forests where they once were found?"

"Should high school students have to prove competency in core knowledge and skills to receive a diploma?"

"Should the U.S. build an anti-ballistic missile system for national defense?"

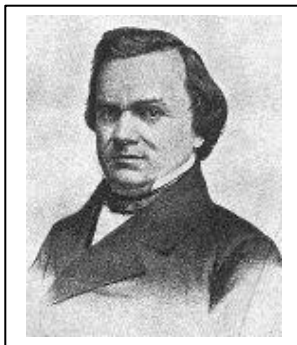
3. Research the topic, keeping key facts and expert opinions organized into subtopics. Obviously computers can also be highly useful in retrieving desired information. Use library resources for your research on the selected topic. Among available reference sources are EBSCO, Wilson, and SIRS.

## Part II: Engaging in the Debate

Participate in the debate in front of a class, designating a timekeeper.

- You have 5 minutes to present your case.
- You have 3 minutes of rebuttal after your opponent speaks.

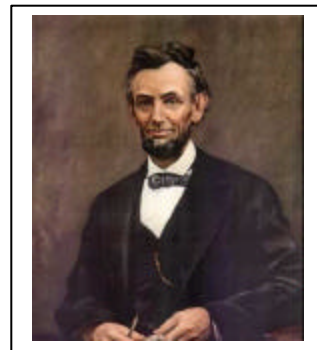
Your teacher can assemble a panel of judges who will evaluate the strength of your arguments. Their evaluations will assist your teacher in assessing your work on this project.



**Stephen O. Douglas**  
1813-1861

### Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858

Perhaps the most famous political debates in American history occurred between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in which extension of slavery into western territories was the biggest issue.



**Abraham Lincoln**  
1809-1865