

Chapter 12 Debate: Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?

Introduction

Teachers can use class debates to help students understand conflicting perspectives of a past time and place *or* of a contemporary issue. This often involves dividing the class into two or more parts and assigning each group a role. Students are then encouraged to take on that role and argue their position. They need to argue the position they are assigned, *regardless* of whether or not they agree with that position. Sometimes, teachers may encourage students to know both sides of the argument and have the two sides switch roles midway through the debate.

Objectives of This Debate

- Students will be able to describe the symbolism of the terms “melting pot” and salad bowl” in regards to how immigrants relate to America.
- Students will be able to make arguments on both sides of the debate over to what degree immigrants have to give up their heritage to become Americans.
- Students will be able to define multi-culturalism.

Background

One of the unique aspects of the American story is the way in which the United States has been a magnet for peoples from all over the globe. From the outset, America has been a nation of immigrants. Over the years, the countries of origin have changed and immigration policies have shifted from a wide open door to restrictions designed to keep certain people, who for that historical moment are deemed undesirable, from entering. But immigrants continue to come and the story repeated again and again is the story of the newcomers becoming Americans. Typically, this occurs over a couple of generations, and for years Americans spoke of this nation as a “melting pot” where immigrants shed the characteristics of their old cultures to become part of a new and uniquely American culture.

The civil rights movement of the last half of the twentieth century awakened in people across America a new awareness of and pride in their ethnic origins. This multi-cultural awareness led some to advocate dropping the metaphor of a melting pot, and instead using the ideas symbolized by a salad bowl. In a salad bowl, each ingredient remains a distinctive, separate element, yet still blends together to make a healthy satisfying product. The question is clear. What makes for a healthier nation? Is it a country where we shed our differences and become one, or is it a country where we celebrate our differences and build on their strengths?

Procedures

This debate can be done in one class period. The teacher should divide the class into two parts, each side making arguments for their perspective. Students should be reminded that they should stick to their role and argue *passionately* for their position, despite what they personally may believe. They should also be encouraged to base their points on factual information, rather than opinion and emotion.

Each side of the debate should research both their position AND the position of their opponents. This is important in the event the teacher elects to have the sides change positions. It also makes for a better debate because each side is better able to counter arguments of their opponents.

Students should be able to use *America: The Last Best Hope* to find dual perspectives on these issues, but teachers will also need to provide background through short lectures or explanations. Students can also do research on their own to find arguments to support their point of view. Primary sources from the period can be particularly valuable as a side builds its case.

The following chart represents basic points that should be covered by both sides. Teachers should not immediately give students these points. They might be offered to each side after students have had time to research on their own, or they might be withheld until after the debate and used as a summary or to debrief the debate.

A blank version of the chart is offered at the end of this debate. Students may use this blank chart to take notes as they research their positions in the debate.

When the debate takes place, arrange student desks or chairs with the two debate factions on opposite sides of the classroom *facing each other*. The teacher should serve as a moderator, beginning the proceedings, laying out the question, and calling on members of each side in alternating order. If the debate begins to lag, the teacher may call a short break and have each side “caucus” to rethink their positions and prepare responses to arguments made by the other side.

Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?

| Melting Pot | Salad Bowl |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For generations, Americans have believed in becoming one people. It is critical that we not stress our differences, but rather come together as Americans who believe in a core set of values. • We cannot be a united people and also be a nation of “hyphenated” Americans. If we focus on being Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Italian-Americans, and any other type of Americans – we are <i>not</i> united, but rather breaking apart. • What has always made us strong is our belief that <i>anyone</i> can come here and become American. That is totally unique to our story. That is not true for so many other nations of the globe. Most of us cannot go to Japan and become Japanese or to France and become French. But immigrants CAN come here and join us to become Americans. BUT, this does require leaving the past behind and focusing on becoming American. • We are already too divided as a nation. This focus on our differences only divides us more. • Where does this end – with everyone in their own ethnic neighborhoods speaking their own languages? We have to get away from that. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For far too long, immigrants came here and were made to feel ashamed of who they truly were. • One does NOT have to give up their ethnicity to become American. We can have common American values AND still focus on what makes us unique. • America is strongest when we celebrate our differences. We are stronger when we draw on all of those differences. • When people give up their heritage, they give up a big part of themselves. • The beauty of America is that our values transcend our differences. We can be Italian-Americans, Irish Americans, African-Americans – any type of Americans – yet we remain Americans and believe in the same core principles. Those are the principles found in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. • We show the world time and time again that we are the only nation that can have such harmony in a world of difference. • There is nothing wrong with America being a land of multiple languages. That is nothing more than a measure of how the globe is shrinking by the day. America should be proud to reflect that. |

Student Debate Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

As your group researches their position on these issues, use the following table to record your views and prepare for the debate. You should research and prepare for *both* sides of this debate. As the debate progresses, make notes made by the opposing side that your side did not anticipate.

Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?

| Melting Pot | Salad Bowl |
|--------------------|-------------------|
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