

Common Core and debate

Literacy in social studies: The Common Core requires students to read a broad variety of texts, including informational text, and literacy in social studies (as well as history and science) is a particular focus area. Key literacy skills that are emphasized in the Common Core social studies standards are: paying attention to language, evaluating evidence, and comparing points of view. (See Table 1 below for the details on these standards.)

These Common Core literacy skills are heavily used in debate, and students receive explicit instruction as well as intense practice. For each debate topic, students receive multiple pages of quotations from news media, articles, books, and so on. They read and select key passages to use in their debates that summarize authors' viewpoints, supporting the textual evidence and central idea Common Core standards. Because all debate topics are focused on government policy or social phenomena, students learn intensively about how social and political processes work, supporting this Common Core standard as well. Debaters have to assess whether authors are using manipulative language and making solid arguments before they quote them, and must also listen carefully to quotations their opponents use for the same issues, which supports the attention to language and evaluating evidence standards. Finally, because debaters have to be prepared for both sides of a topic, they must be aware of all viewpoints and all available information about it, supporting both the comparing points of view and integrating information standards.

Debate requires and teaches all of these key literacy skills outlined in the Common Core social studies and general reading standards.

Speaking and listening: The Common Core also delineates several oral communication skills, which debate teaches as well. Key skills here include collaborative group work, civil exchange of ideas, effective questioning of others, and presentation skills. (See Table 2 below for the details on these standards.)

Oral communication skills are taught and reinforced through practice on a debate team. Debate students work with a partner for weeks to prepare for a competition, supporting the collaborative group work standard. Furthermore, every student learns the sportsmanship ethos of debate competition, supporting both the exchange of ideas and the civil discussion standards found in Common Core. Debaters also must learn how to ask questions during the cross-examination of opponents, supporting the questioning standard. Students must listen carefully to understand their opponents' arguments and evidence, and debaters look for arguments that they can concede and arguments they must object to, supporting both the analyzing a speaker and the synthesizing viewpoints standards. Finally, debaters learn how to organize their own speeches into a logical order and how to deliver them persuasively, supporting the presentation standard.

Debate requires and teaches students all of these key oral communication skills outlined in the Common Core speaking and listening standards.

TABLE 1

Literacy in Social Studies Appendix; compare also to Reading: Informational Text

Standards	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-10	Grades 11-12	Debate
Textual evidence	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources , connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.	<i>From the very beginning of learning about a topic, debaters read quotations from news media, articles, books, etc. Debaters must always be able to point to the specific textual evidence that backs up their arguments.</i>
Central idea	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source ; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source ; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.	<i>Debaters learn to read news media, articles, and books and quickly find out which side the author supports and their key arguments.</i>
Understanding social processes	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3 Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text , determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence , acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.	<i>In debating the topics, which typically center on government policy, debaters learn about how different laws are passed, how society changes over time, and how many social, political, and economic processes work.</i>

Attention to language	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in <i>Federalist</i> No. 10).	<i>Debaters must always be attentive to the language of their sources and their opponents', looking for how words are defined differently by different authors and for how manipulative language can obscure true meanings.</i>
Evaluating evidence	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.	<i>The sources that debaters use must provide solid arguments and evidence to back up their viewpoints; "expertise" as a sole justification isn't acceptable.</i>
Comparing points of view		CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.	<i>Debaters have to be ready to debate both sides of every topic, so they must be aware of all the differing viewpoints, understanding where different authors agree and disagree.</i>
Integrating information into a coherent whole			CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event , noting discrepancies among sources.	<i>At the end of a topic, coaches will require their debaters to reflect on and summarize all that they have learned about that topic.</i>

TABLE 2

Speaking and listening standards Appendix

Standard	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grades 9-10	Grades 11-12	Debate
Collaborative group work	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	<i>Debaters participate in whole class discussion led by their coach and also workshop leaders. Debaters work with a partner to get prepared on a topic, selecting the arguments they will make. Debaters work with judges, opponents, and older and younger debaters.</i>

Exchange of ideas	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.	<i>In debates, students must make extensive use of their research and evidence to advance their arguments and challenge their opponents.</i>
Civil discussion	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.B Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.B Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.B Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.	<i>A major part of the unwritten norms of debating is learning how to be both challenging and simultaneously civil. Politeness, coupled with confidence and directness, are crucial skills debaters learn.</i>

<p>Questioning and challenging</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.C Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.</p>	<p><i>All debates feature cross-examination periods, where students have the opportunity to ask their opponents questions, as well as answering questions themselves. Cross-examination skills include posing good questions that challenge evidence, get at the heart of an argument, or summarize a big idea.</i></p>
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<p>Synthesizing diverse viewpoints</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.D Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.</p>	<p><i>During debates, students frequently have to summarize opponents' arguments before refuting them, and they often need to concede arguments on which they and their opponents agree. Debaters need to narrow down their objections to the few irreconcilable differences. After the debate, students often find their own views shift because of arguments their opponents made.</i></p>
<p>Analyzing a speaker's point of view and evidence</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.</p>	<p><i>The heart of debate is analyzing an opponent's viewpoint and whether the evidence presented is sufficient to justify those claims.</i></p>

<p>Present logically and with appropriate speaking techniques</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</p>	<p><i>After reading extensively about a topic, debaters must organize their information into their opening speech, also known as a constructive speech. Finding the appropriate organization and supporting evidence are crucial. Debaters also learn how to speak clearly and use appropriate eye contact and body movement.</i></p>
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