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Newsweek



INTRODUCTION

We need better arguments.

Arguing has a negative connotation, but it is the heart of democracy. Effective argumentation listens first, accepts nuance, chases accuracy, and ultimately challenges us to form more thoughtful, logical and grounded opinions. It forces us to face and use reason to reckon with – rather than categorically dismiss – opposing views. And the stakes couldn't be higher: we all use our opinions to make decisions that affect our countries and communities every day – from who we elect to represent us, to the people we fight for, to the organizations we choose to work at and support. But good argumentation is a skill we're losing as a society. Social media fuels Tweet-sized hot takes, unsubstantiated outrage, and overly simplified, distorted caricatures of others' views.

Created in collaboration between Washington Urban Debate League, Boston Debate League, *The Social Dilemma*, and young debaters, this resource serves to combat the polarization, hate and gridlock that defines today's culture and politics with a new generation of strong debaters. Using *The Social Dilemma* as a launching point, it prompts students to study the foundational tenets of argumentation and then advocate a potential solution to Big Social's exploitative business model. By debating what to do about our toxic information ecosystem, students will drive at the heart of a societal issue that is eroding our ability to engage in constructive discourse around the myriad existential threats we face today.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Gain a deeper awareness of the consequences of extractive technology, including its effects on mental health, democracy, and discrimination
- Learn how to articulate and advocate for systemic solutions
- Hone debate, communication and collaboration skills around a complex and controversial subject
- Learn the value of incorporating diverse perspectives into one's worldview to discuss and solve big problems

CONTENTS

Due to both the sprawling nature of the subject and the flexibility of this resource, it can be used with middle, high school and college students in a variety of classes, from history and civics to digital media, sociology and language arts. Any of these activities can be done as a class or for homework, and we encourage educators to adapt activities to their classroom's needs.



TOTAL ESTIMATED LENGTH

2 - 2.5 HOURS

WATCH

40 or 90 minutes

- Watch *The Social Dilemma* – either the full film or the shortened educational version. All educational screenings must be registered to gain free access.
- Reflect on the “Film Viewing Prompts” individually while watching the film or as part of an all-class discussion.



READ

20 minutes

- Review the “I Can” Checklist.
- Read “What Is An Argument” and “How to Be Persuasive” handouts.



DEBATE

20 minutes

- Read “Now, Your Turn” together as a class to introduce the activity.
- Students individually outline their arguments.
- Students divide into groups of 4-5 to deliver their arguments.
- (Optional add-on) 5 minutes: Students record 2-minute videos of their arguments and share them as part of the The Social Dilemma Debate Project video submission component.

FILM VIEWING PROMPTS

INSTRUCTIONS

Reflect on these questions while watching *The Social Dilemma*. Time stamps for both the full and shortened version of the film that denote the beginning of each relevant section. *Please note: All educational screenings must be [registered](#) to secure free access to the film.*



Full film timestamp //
Short film timestamp

PROMPTS

00:00 // **00:00**

The quote “Nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse” from Ancient Greek playwright Sophocles appears at the beginning of the documentary. How could this relate to technology? Does social media have a “curse”?

03:00 // **02:30**

The interviewer asks each film subject about “the problem” in the tech industry. Why are they having trouble putting it into words? How would you define the problem?

13:04 // **05:04**

Why do social media companies collect our data? What do the film subjects mean when they say that we’re the “product”? What are the consequences of turning people into products?

17:50 // **08:09**

What do the three fictional characters on the other side of the screen represent?

1:15:09 // **23:25**

Why is social media such a fertile place for misinformation? What does film subject Cathy O’Neil mean when she says, “They don’t have a proxy for truth that’s better than a click”?

I CAN CHECKLIST

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all statements that apply to you.

Entering into debate and any kind of public speaking can be daunting, but speaking from the heart and drawing on evidence that you prepare in advance can set you up for success. And more than anything, a belief in your ability to engage in healthy debate is the first step. Read these prompts aloud together as a class to establish your intentions and abilities.

- ☐ I CAN understand the multiple viewpoints of a pressing social issue.
- ☐ I CAN construct an argument.
- ☐ I CAN persuade an audience.
- ☐ I CAN outline and deliver a short, persuasive, non-scripted speech.
- ☐ I CAN defend my opinions if someone asks me questions.
- ☐ I CAN question information presented from multiple sources.

READING

INSTRUCTIONS

Read “What Is An Argument” and “How To Be Persuasive” on the next two pages. Highlight, underline, or take notes on the articles as needed.

WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

You’ve probably gotten into an argument with your parents about going out, or your teacher over a grade. Even though we call these interactions “arguments,” in an academic sense, these aren’t what you’d see in a published paper or essay.

A complete argument has three main parts: stating the argument, explaining the support behind it, and articulating why that matters. These three parts can be called the **claim**, **warrant**, and **impact**.

A **claim** is what we usually think of when we think of an argument. It’s the “what” of your point – the equivalent of a thesis statement.

A **warrant** is the “why” of the argument. This is what supports your argument. You can use evidence from news articles, academic journals/publications, or factual personal experience.

Finally, the **impact** of an argument is a “why” question. It’s the broader meaning of the argument. What are the implications of the warrant? Why does the warrant mean your claim is true?

Think of it as...

CLAIM I think that

WARRANT because

IMPACT This is important because

EXAMPLE 1

I think that I should adopt a daily time limit for using my social media apps because too much time on social media has proven to have a damaging effect on my mental health. This is important because I’m not able to fully enjoy my life and the things I love when I’m anxious.

EXAMPLE 2

I think that students should not have to do homework because the school day is already 7 hours long. This is important because students have a lot on their plate with work, family, and extracurriculars.

HOW TO BE PERSUASIVE

Now that you know what the parts of an argument are, you may be struggling to figure out how to put persuasion into words. Fear not! The Ancient Greeks thought the same thing, and came up with a concept that we now call “The Rhetorical Triangle.” The Rhetorical Triangle is called as such because it highlights three tools that we can use to persuade people. These tools will usually be used when you describe the warrant or impact in your argument, or you could use them in a separate sentence to describe why your warrant is solid.

First, **Ethos** is the use of credibility to persuade. This could be done through highlighting the research you use and how celebrated or experienced the authors are. For example, you might say, “This author has their doctorate in this subject, so they are very qualified to write about this issue,” or “This person has firsthand experience with this problem, so their perspective is credible.”

Second, **Logos** is the use of logic to support your argument. This can be reports, statistics, or objective reasoning on your subject. An example of the use of logos in an argument is when someone references a statistic, like “3.96 billion people use social media.”

Finally, **Pathos** is the use of emotional appeals to forward an argument. Usually, this will be through describing the stories of people affected by an issue. An example of the use of pathos in the impact portion of an argument is referencing children affected by a certain government policy.



NOW, YOUR TURN



DRAFT YOUR SPEECH

Using your issue area knowledge from *The Social Dilemma*, your learnings on how to persuade from the handouts, and the suggested outline on the following page, draft a 2-minute speech answering the following questions:

[Should we change how social media is regulated?]

If yes, how? If no, how else might we protect our information ecosystem, the values of a democratic society and individual wellbeing?



SHARE IT WITH YOUR CLASSMATES

Once you and your peers have completed your outlines, present your speeches in small groups. Allow for a 1-2 minute period of cross-examination between students to ask questions about each other's positions.



SAY IT TO THE WORLD

Take a video of your argument and submit it as part of The Social Dilemma Debate Project. We'll be sharing the top videos with our network of legislators, issue experts, and advocacy groups.

COMING SOON

TIPS

- Because two minutes is not a lot of time, imagine that society can only choose one solution, and be sure your speech only advocates for the single solution you've chosen.
- Feel free to include your own perspective drawing from firsthand experience as a form of "pathos".
- You do not have to memorize your speech, and it should not be fully pre-scripted. Instead, use your outline (see next page) as guidance to help you present.
- For inspiration, you can [watch a recording of Washington, D.C. and Boston students debating regulatory solutions to Big Social's business model.](#)



You can use [The Social Dilemma's website](#), the last few minutes from the film, and this [list of potential regulatory pathways](#) as starting points for developing your argument around a potential solution.

SPEECH OUTLINE

A 2-minute speech will usually have an intro, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Don't write out your speech word-for-word like an essay. Try to structure each paragraph with bullet points highlighting the key points, and use those when you are speaking.



INTRODUCTION / THESIS

20 - 30 seconds

FIRST ARGUMENT / BODY PARAGRAPH 1

30 - 45 seconds

Claim

Warrant

Impact

SECOND ARGUMENT / COUNTERARGUMENT / BODY PARAGRAPH 2

30 - 45 seconds

Claim

Warrant

Impact

CONCLUSION

15 - 20 seconds