

Racial Profiling: A Structured Controversy

Position A: Racial profiling is an effective law enforcement tool and should be used by police whenever they think it most helpful. Police officers should be able to stop and search members of certain racial or ethnic groups because officers believe that these groups are more likely than others to commit certain types of crime.

Position B: Racial profiling should never become an acceptable law enforcement practice because it infringes on individual constitutional liberties. Only when there is particular individualized suspicion based on a person's actions should officers have the authority to stop and search.

Step One: 20 minutes

Each team reviews materials on topic and prepares supporting arguments for its assigned position. Try to identify four or five arguments you believe to be the most compelling for your position. Support your arguments with facts found in readings.

Step Two: 6 minutes

Each team has three minutes to state its views and arguments without interruption from the opposing team. You may want to take notes when the other team presents its position. Position A team begins.

Step Three: 2 minutes

Open discussion between teams A and B. Step out of the "debate" format and ask questions, clarify meanings, seek evidence.

Teams Switch Positions and Repeat Process

Step One: 5 minutes

Switch chairs so that Team A is sitting in the position of Team B and vice versa. Each team should prepare supporting arguments for its new positions. Teams can use arguments already advanced by the other team for a position, but should try to strengthen such arguments by combining and adding to them; teams can also choose other arguments that they believe will be more compelling than those already used.

Step Two: 6 minutes

Each team has three minutes to state its views and arguments without interruption from the other team. Position B team (the former position A team) begins.

Step Three: 2 minutes

Open discussion between teams A and B. Step out of the debate format and ask questions, clarify meanings, seek evidence.

FINALE: 5 minutes

Merge your teams and try to reach a consensus position on the issues discussed that is acceptable to both teams and prepare to share your consensus with the class. Write out your consensus position on a piece of paper that can be posted on the board when you present your group's position.

Source: JoEllen Ambrose, social studies teacher, Champlin Park High School, Champlin, Minnesota