

“In Defense of.....”

An exercise in empathy

- Appropriate for grades 8 – 12
- Designed to give students the opportunity to see both sides of an issue

We are all aware of issues or groups receiving negative attention or inciting controversy, and we all usually have an opinion on them. But have you ever thought about things from the “unpopular” side? This exercise asks students to argue “in defense” of an issue or group many view in a negative light.

Students are divided into small groups of four or five. A box or bowl containing slips of paper on which issues or groups are written is passed among the groups. Each group chooses one slip of paper. The group must then use available resources (e.g., magazines, internet, books, etc.) to research their issue or group and develop an argument to present to the rest of the class defending that issue or group and explaining it from the “unpopular” point of view. Groups may prepare flip charts or other visual aids, should each have a turn presenting part of their argument, and should be prepared to defend their position to the class during a 5 – 10 minute discussion period.

Some examples of issues or groups to argue “in defense of...”

- Building of an Islamic Mosque near the site of the World Trade Centers
- Hispanic Immigration
- Conservative Republican or Liberal Democratic political views
- Gay marriage
- Homeschooling
- Medicinal marijuana use
- Mainstreaming students with special needs
- Naturally curly African-American hair styles vs. “permed” hair and “weaves”