

read this book, and therefore likely to be in a debating motion. Sitting opposite you are people who are going to try to prove you wrong. One way they can do this is by showing you've got your facts wrong. If you think Brexit is a brand of cereal, Trump is a character in a comedy programme, climate change means the difference between summer and winter and the gender pay gap is a geological phenomenon, then you're going to be in trouble. Even if you know a bit more than that, you're going to need to know more than the other side if you want to win the debate.

How are you going to do that?

You need to get into habits. The habit of watching, reading, listening to the news. The habit, too, of being careful with what you read, of judging how accurate it is, of how much bias there is in it, of noticing what it chooses to put in and what it chooses to leave out. The habit of reading something longer than a Twitter post or an Instagram meme. The habit of being willing to listen to versions of current events you don't agree with (because one day you might have to argue for them). The habit of taking an interest both in the small details of the news and in the wider issues and forces behind them. The habit of working out why things happen as well as knowing what happens.

If you do all that, you will be well prepared for whatever motion you're given, whatever side you have to take.

But there's more (as there often is with debating).

If you do all that, if you really get to know the world around you and what's going on in it, you'll not only be a better debater, fully equipped with the facts and figures at her fingertips; you'll also be a better person. You'll be a fully engaged citizen of the world, who takes an interest in what is happening in it. The world can be a scary place sometimes. It can feel like a lot of bad things are happening, and they're out of our control. But knowing more about it, knowing why those things happen, gives you much more control than if you keep yourself in the dark. You'll be in a better position to influence what happens in that world. One day you may be able to change it for the better. One day you may even be able to save it.

Which brings us on to our last because.

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Twitter
post

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Because debating can save the world

Imagine two friends, Alex and Ayesha.

They really like each other. They enjoy each other's company. They do lots of stuff together. Then, one day, Alex says or does something that Ayesha doesn't like. Ayesha feels hurt and let down by Alex. She feels angry about what has happened. So angry, that when she tells Alex about it, she finds herself raising her voice. But Alex doesn't seem to be listening. So she raises her voice some more. After a while she is shouting at Alex, and he feels threatened, even a little scared. So scared that he can't listen to what Ayesha is really saying. Instead of listening to what she's saying, he starts shouting back. Now Ayesha gets even more upset. She shouts even louder. She brings in stuff that has nothing to do with whatever originally upset her (why, exactly, did you tell Rebecca what my sister told me about her boyfriend? I told you not to tell anyone). So Alex retaliates, with more stuff that has nothing to do with whatever they were arguing about in the first place (it was because of you that I got into trouble in Maths. I covered for you that day, and you never even said thank you). And so it goes on. Before long, they're each convinced that the other is a seriously bad person, and they're using words about each other which I can't print here. After half an hour of this, Ayesha storms off, and she and Alex are no longer talking to each other. They spend that evening on their phones each instructing their group of friends not to talk to their ex-friend who is now their enemy. What a shame. They really liked each other.

Have you ever had an argument like that?

Does it remind you of anything?

It reminds me of a lot of politics today. Someone says (or tweets) something that another group of people doesn't approve of. Instead of trying to understand why they said (or tweeted) it, and explaining why they disagree, they attack the person who said (or tweeted) it, letting them (and the world) know what an awful person they must be. If they can, they get them banned, or fired, or excluded in some way. Of course, this doesn't change the mind of the first person. It just makes her or him (and all the people who agree with what she or he said or tweeted) even more angry about whatever it was they said (or tweeted) in the first place, even more certain that they are right and that anyone who disagrees with them is not just wrong but a bad person. At the end of it, everyone is more intolerant, more angry, more certain of their own

Everyone
is more
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more
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more
certain of
their own
superiority
over
anyone
who
disagrees
with them