

CHAPTER 1

THE VALUE OF DEBATE

If you have chosen to read this book, you no doubt enjoy a good argument! But *competitive debate* means more than arguing with a friend about whether video games cause violence or some other subject of interest. In an organized system now almost a century old, thousands of American high schools and middle schools offer opportunities to participate in debate tournaments. Homeschool debate leagues also now sponsor debate tournaments. In these tournaments, students present and defend pre-prepared arguments in competition with the opposing arguments from another school or league. The topics for these competitions are selected by national organizations, meaning that students throughout the United States are debating the same topics. Each debate “round” is judged by experienced critics who have the responsibility to declare a “winner” and a “loser.” Debate tournaments produce regional, state, and national champions in each style of debate.

This first chapter discusses the benefits of competitive debate. These benefits have been shared by hundreds of thousands of students who have participated in debate, not simply the smaller group of state and national champions.

DEBATE MAKES LEARNING FUN!

Debate competition turns learning into an exciting game. Unlike some other academic games, winners are not those who have memorized the greatest number of “facts.” Debate competition introduces its participants to a much broader world of ideas. Successful debaters are able to articulate “why” something is true, uncovering sometimes hidden value assumptions.

The search for the “why” comes naturally to the human spirit. Normal three- or four-year-old children go through a phase of asking “why?” to every statement made by their parents. The parents soon discover that every answer or explanation will still be met with “why?” Ultimately, the adults end the game with “I don’t know” or “because I said so.” Some children grow tired of inquiry and simply accept the statements of others as inscrutable truth. Yet for most of us, the search for the “why” never ends. If the question is gun control, it isn’t enough to know that a prominent senator supports it; we want to know more.