

underestimate our opposition until we have truly considered the strength of the evidence supporting their position. Competitive debate provides students a safe space for the testing of ideas.

RESEARCH SKILLS

Debate teaches cutting-edge research skills. Because the quality of an argument often depends on the strength of the supporting evidence, debaters quickly learn to find the best evidence. This means going beyond run-of-the-mill Internet sources to government hearings, law reviews, professional journal articles, and book-length treatments of subjects. Debaters learn how to evaluate study methodology and source credibility.

Debaters also learn how to process massive amounts of data into usable argument *briefs*. Argument briefs bring together the strongest logical reasons and evidence supporting various positions. The ability to gather and organize evidence into logical units is a skill that is treasured by business decision-makers, government policy-makers, legal practitioners, scientists, and educators.

EMPOWERMENT

Debate training offers empowerment—empowerment for women, empowerment for disadvantaged minorities, and empowerment for young people in general. Because of their backgrounds, some individuals feel powerless, as if their opinion does not matter. Yet powerful adults typically react with surprise (and sometimes even with awe) when in the presence of logical and articulate young people.

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor and now professor of social and economic policy at Brandeis University, has described competitive debate as the “great leveler”: “Debate leagues can help reduce the educational-opportunity gap that separates rich and poor communities and thus they can help our children’s chances and our nation’s future” (Winkler et al.).

Eddie Wexler is a social studies teacher and debate coach in Oakland, California. He has described how debate helps students “find their voices”: “Urban debate is transformative in an individual sense. It directly changes the lives of kids in a way that big, sweeping school reforms do not. ... My kids’ analytical skills have taken off. And some of the most shy, timid kids have been emboldened in the most positive way. Debate has helped my kids find their voices. ... And now, in a society that has pretty much ignored them, they will have a greatly improved ability to make themselves heard” (Winkler et al.).