

Dr. Joseph Zompetti, professor of communication at Illinois State University, describes the career benefits of debate in the recent book *Discovering the World Through Debate*: “Debaters learn how to think on their feet and to express themselves clearly in front of an audience. These skills can serve them, of course, throughout their academic careers, but they are also fundamentally important in a variety of professions, such as teaching, law, business management, or citizen activism. In sum, there are broad educational benefits to participating in debate.”

Many successful attorneys began their training as high school debaters. San Francisco area attorney Raoul Kennedy said the following about his own debate experience: “I truly believe I would have been as prepared for law school had I simply debated and not attended college at all. I have found that the practice of law—and I assume this is true of a large number of other jobs—consists basically of trying to solve problems in an organized manner. ... Debate placed a premium on the factors that I believe are essential to effective problem solving” (Kay, p. 8).

John Sexton, president of New York University, has written the following about the value of competitive debate: “Those four years in debate were the educational foundation of everything I did. And I don’t mean that in some simple form. ... I’m saying the finest education I got from any of the institutions that I attended, the foundation of my mind that I got during those four years of competitive debate: that is, 90% of the intellectual capacity that I operate with today; Fordham [University] for college, Fordham for the Ph.D., Harvard for law school—all of that is the other 10%” (Winkler et al.).

President John F. Kennedy once said, “I think debating in high school and college is most valuable training whether for politics, the law, business, or for service on community committees such as the PTA and the League of Women Voters” (Kay, p. 3). President Lyndon Baines Johnson was a high school debate coach before he became a member of Congress and later president of the United States.

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Topics for competitive debate are typically the hottest political issues of the day. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in his 2004 testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (commonly called the 9/11 Commission), said the following: “I used to think one of the most powerful individuals in America was the person who could select the annual high school debate topic. Think of the power to set the agenda, and determine what millions of high school students will study, read about, think about, talk about with friends, discuss with their teachers, and debate with their parents and siblings over dinner” (Minch, p. 5).