



Philosophical Chairs

AVID@Home is an opportunity for parents to support AVID strategies at home with their own children.

In the AVID classroom or content classes using AVID strategies, Philosophical Chairs is a strategy used to teach students how to debate a topic professionally. The focus is on responding to another person's comments, adding information from the class, mixing in some opinions and real life experiences, and defending each argument with evidence.

Philosophical Chairs can be used after reading an article about potential solutions to problems, about politics, science topics, events in history, themes in books that are being read, issues in a health class, and more. Students are asked to stand on one side or the other indicating whether they agree or disagree with the topic. During the Philosophical Chairs, if they change their mind, they are allowed to switch sides. They are often asked to explain what it was that changed their minds.

Some topics that might be used for a Philosophical Chairs in different classes are as follows:

Science-

Kelp harvesting should be continued because it's so useful to humans.
Does centripetal force exist?

Social Studies-

Was Sherman's Total War a good thing or a bad thing?
Nuclear weapons aren't necessary anymore and should be abolished.

English-

Books with racist slurs should not be allowed in school.
Which character was more evil, Shere Khan from The Jungle Book or Long John Silver from Treasure Island?

Mathematics-

Nobody will ever use algebra in real life.
Which method for calculating the number of apples that can fit in this classroom is best?

Physical Education-

Exercise is more effective for losing weight than dieting is.
Professional male athletes and female athletes should be paid the same amount.

At home, Philosophical Chairs will be a little less formal. They will be more like an academic debate between a small number of people. Some of the rules to keep the debate professional should still be followed. You might consider some of these rules:

- 1) Before commenting, the person must summarize or paraphrase what the other person said.
- 2) Each comment should have some factual information in it, not completely opinion.
- 3) All comments should be related to the topic, not to the other person.

There are numerous topics that can be debated at home from information seen on television, political topics, miracle cures and diets, whether the items in infomercials really work as advertised, the winner of political debates, etc.

This is how a Philosophical Chairs at home might sound. The two characters below are discussing which candidate won a political debate that they just watched together on television.

Mother: Candidate #1 made some great points about how a balanced approach to taxes and spending are the best solution for the budget.

Daughter: I agree that he focused a lot of energy in showing that raising taxes alone won't solve the problems, but he overestimates how much power the president has to affect the economy. When he said, "I'll create jobs for the middle class," he said it as though he could just flip a switch and new jobs would form out of thin air.

Mother: You're right, the president doesn't have complete power, that's the whole idea behind a democracy. All that I heard Candidate #2 saying, however, were empty political promises with no plans behind them. When he said that he would get the unemployment rate back to the levels it was in 2004, he didn't give any plan whatsoever for how he would do it. So, Candidate #1 isn't the only person who made promises that he might not be able to keep.

Daughter: That's true, they both said that they would do things that they may not actually be able to do. You know how important a college education is to me. And I really don't think that there's any way that we can continue to provide the present levels of financial aid if we don't raise taxes. Candidate #1 sounded like he's afraid to raise taxes. Candidate #2 said he'll raise taxes to allow more students to be able to attend college.

Mother: College is important to me too, of course. I just don't think that you can maintain financial aid and reduce the deficit with taxes alone.

Daughter: Yes, you're probably right; we're going to need both. I'll have to do some research and see what Candidate #2 thinks about spending cuts. Let's continue this when I'm done.