

# Fostering Civil Discourse



## A Guide for Classroom Conversations

In the midst of a divisive United States presidential election; ongoing issues related to race, justice, and policing; and a series of tragic acts of violence around the world, educators are rightly concerned about the lessons that today's middle and high school students might be absorbing about problem solving, communication, civility, and their ability to make a difference. The next generation of voters needs models for constructive public discourse to learn from; the strength of our democracy requires it. But such examples seem few and far between.

How we talk about things matters, and we are not always well equipped. We may be able to share our views easily with those who already agree. But civil discourse is different, and it's critical to our ability to function as a democracy. How do we express our opinion while leaving room for someone else's viewpoint? How do we engage when we may be embarrassed to reveal that we don't have all the information? How can we seek out or listen to those who hold different beliefs from our own and try to understand their point of view? How can we respectfully disagree?

We educators have an essential role to play. The classroom should be a place where students learn to exchange ideas, listen respectfully to different points of view, try out ideas and positions, and give—and get—constructive feedback without fear or intimidation. Through engaging in difficult conversations, students gain critical thinking skills, empathy and tolerance, and a sense of civic responsibility.

On the following pages, we have provided some tools to help prepare your classroom and your students to practice civil discourse, an essential skill for effective civic participation, including:

1. **Start with Yourself**
2. **Develop a Reflective Classroom Community**
3. **Create a Classroom Contract**
4. **Provide Opportunities for Student Reflection**
5. **Establish a Safe Space for Sensitive Topics**
6. **Implement Effective Teaching Strategies**



FACING  
HISTORY  
AND  
OURSELVES

People make choices. Choices make history.

# Start with Yourself

In order to create a classroom environment that can effectively support difficult conversations, we must start by striving to model constructive civil discourse ourselves. We have to be aware of our own strongly held beliefs, political positions, emotional responses, and biases and be thoughtful about how they influence what we say and do when the headlines enter into the classroom.

As an educator who works with young people daily, you have both your own feelings to process, as well as concerns for your students. Remember that you are not a neutral participant in your classroom, and take ownership of the lens that you bring to the classroom community. Students may have experiences that are similar to or different from yours that inform their responses.

Educator and Facing History staffer Steven Becton models this important first step in addressing difficult topics in the classroom in a December 2014 [Facing Today blog post](#). He shares his personal reflections after learning that there would be no indictment for the death of Eric Garner, who died as the result of a confrontation with New York City police.

*As I prepared to write this post, I had to confront the most difficult, yet most important, person that I would be in conversation with: myself.*

*I am an African American male with a 21-year-old son. I have always prided myself on staying “above the fray” in conversations about race. I try to find a place of mutual understanding, to give others the benefit of the doubt, and to attempt to see an experience from the other’s perspective. As a Facing History and Ourselves staff member for the past 13 years, and its associate program director for urban education for the past 4, I regularly facilitate conversations of this nature with students, educators, parents, and community leaders around the world.*

*After a New York grand jury decided not to bring an indictment in the killing of Eric Garner, I again watched the video footage of Garner’s final few moments during an attempted arrest in the Tompkinsville neighborhood of Staten Island for selling loose cigarettes. I watched Garner breathe his last breath as several officers wrestled him to the ground, one with a chokehold that later proved lethal.*

*As Garner took his last breath, I nearly lost mine. I just could not make sense of it. I could not find that middle ground, that higher ground. For some reason, this particular incident was a trigger for me. It triggered anger, fear for my son, and outrage toward law enforcement. I started looking for simple answers, knowing that there aren’t any. I started looking for someone to blame, knowing no one person is at fault.*

As I watched the video, I could not have a rational debate regarding whether the police actions were justified or legal. I saw a human being die a senseless death. It was breathtaking to watch. I felt something that I deemed worse than anger. I felt hopelessness.

**But I knew that I could not stay there.**

As a Facing History staff member, I needed to do what I ask our students to do. When confronting difficult historical moments or current events, I ask students to resist generalizations, to judge responsibly, to consider reliable sources, and to make conclusions without prejudice. I ask them to avoid retreating from uncomfortable conversations, to participate in them actively and thoughtfully instead. I could not resign myself to believe that black lives have less value than any other life. I could not live with the conclusion that all white police are racists. I did not want to assume that even the particular police in this specific event are racist. I do not know them. All of those conclusions were too simplistic. I knew that if I were to fall into the troubling pattern of seeing these experiences only from my own perspective, it would lead to drawing simplistic and divisive conclusions.

**I needed to be in conversation with others.**

I turned to my colleagues, my family, my friends, and to social media. I found a range of responses to the Garner verdict. Some people did not even know about the incident. Some were apathetic, more occupied with last-minute holiday shopping. Some expressed outrage for what they considered a murderous act at the hands of the police. Others sympathized with the very hard job that police have, and concluded that those involved in Garner's death were only doing their job that day. Still others thought that Garner should have been more compliant.

What was most revealing was that these opinions cut across racial lines. That was actually refreshing. In spite of news coverage suggesting something different, there was no monolithic response from the white or black community. The most common sentiment was that the death of Garner was sad and tragic. My personal hopelessness began to lift as I listened to others, and as we shared a common struggle to understand these events and how to prevent them.

As I engaged in conversations with others, I was reminded of the privilege and responsibility of living in a democracy, even an imperfect one. I have the privilege of civil discourse that can lead to necessary change. I have the responsibility to listen to others without judging and labeling. We all need to be in conversations where we feel safe sharing our most vulnerable emotions, raising our most troubling questions, and listening to others' perspectives, and are encouraged to act responsibly.

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Remember that you are not a neutral participant in your classroom.

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You can read the rest of this post, **“After Eric Garner: One School’s Courageous Conversation,”** at [facingtoday.org](http://facingtoday.org).  
[facinghistory.org](http://facinghistory.org).

# Develop a Reflective Classroom Community

We cannot predict what will happen in our communities, our countries, or around the world that might elicit difficult questions from or spark heated debates between students in our classrooms. But we can better prepare our students to respond thoughtfully and respectfully together to such events by taking steps to cultivate a reflective classroom community throughout the school year.

A reflective classroom community is in many ways a microcosm of democracy—a place where explicit rules and implicit norms protect everyone’s right to speak; where different perspectives can be heard and valued; where members take responsibility for themselves, each other, and the group as a whole; and where each member has a stake and a voice in collective decisions. Once established, both you and your students will need to continue to nurture the reflective community on an ongoing basis through the ways that you participate and respond to each other.

We believe that a reflective, supportive classroom community is fostered by:

- Creating a sense of trust and openness
- Encouraging participants to speak and listen to each other
- Making space and time for silent reflection
- Offering multiple avenues for participation and learning
- Helping students appreciate the points of view, talents, and contributions of less vocal members

Even the way we use the physical space in a classroom matters. Some arrangements promote a reflective community better than others. During a whole-class discussion, it is easier for participants to talk to each other when they can see the faces of their fellow students. Arranging the furniture in a circle promotes a sense of community and can make a

difference. Likewise, placing chairs and desks in clusters for small-group work facilitates discussion. And then there’s the wall space. Relevant pictures, posters, and student work can play a role in generating a thoughtful atmosphere.

More than anything, mutual respect must be the cornerstone of the

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classroom environment. Can students take risks? Will they be “shot down” or ridiculed by other students, or even by the teacher, for openly sharing their thoughts? How will the teacher handle it when one student personally insults or belittles another student? Will students be respected and honored as thoughtful participants in a community of learners? A teacher's behavior in these situations sets the tone for the whole class. We need to be explicit and put into practice our belief that a deep respect for each student is at the heart of our educational endeavor.

You can create the foundation for a safe community by jointly creating a classroom contract (see next page). But you also need to make it clear that while you encourage the expression of different viewpoints and diverse voices, you will uphold a standard of civil discourse that keeps things safe for all participants. Given the tone of some public discourse in the press and social media, it is important to point out when things cross the line in order to create a safe community where you will expect and maintain a level of kindness and decency from all students.

# Create a Classroom Contract

One way to help classroom communities establish shared norms is by discussing them openly through a process called “contracting.” Some teachers already customarily create classroom contracts with their students at the start of each course. If you do not typically do so, we recommend that you engage your students in creating one.

Contracts typically include several clearly defined rules or expectations for participation and consequences for those who do not fulfill their obligations as members of the learning community. Any contract created collaboratively by students and the teacher should be consistent with the classroom rules already established by the teacher.

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The following is a list of suggested items for your classroom contract. As you work together to create your own, you may want to discuss, include, or modify any or all of the items on this list:

- Listen with respect. Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgment.
- Make comments using “I” statements. (“I disagree with what you said. Here’s what I think.”)
- If you do not feel safe making a comment or asking a question, write the thought down. You can ask the teacher after class to help you find a safe way to share the idea.
- If someone offers an idea or asks a question that helps your own learning, say “thank you.”
- If someone says something that hurts or offends you, do not attack the person. Acknowledge that the comment—not the person—hurt your feelings and explain why.
- Put-downs are never okay.
- If you don’t understand something, ask a question.
- Think with your head and your heart.
- Share talking time—provide room for others to speak.
- Do not interrupt others while they are speaking.
- Write down thoughts, in a journal or notebook, if you don’t have time to say them during our time together.

We encourage you to frequently remind your students that, regardless of the classroom strategy you are using or the topic you are addressing, it is essential that their participation honors the contract they helped create and follows your own classroom rules. In addition, we strongly recommend that you post the contract in a prominent location in your classroom and refer to its specific language when you redirect students who stray from the guidelines set forth in the contract. You might find that when one student deviates, others will respond by citing the specific expectations listed in the contract.

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**Contracts include clearly defined rules as well as consequences when the rules are disregarded.**

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# Provide Opportunities for Student Reflection

Before engaging in small- or whole-group discussion, provide students with opportunities to formulate and process their ideas. Silence is one of the most powerful and underused tools in the classroom. Whether a teacher uses it to slow down his or her speech to emphasize a point, or adds an extended wait time after asking a question, silence can be invaluable. It creates space for thought and sends students the message that we trust them as thoughtful learners who need time to reflect.

As a tool for silent reflection, keeping a journal helps students develop their ability to critically examine their surroundings from multiple perspectives and to make informed judgments about what they see and hear. Many students find that writing or drawing in a journal helps them process ideas, formulate questions, and retain information. Journals make learning visible by providing a safe, accessible space for students to share thoughts, feelings, and uncertainties. In this way, journals can also be an assessment tool—something teachers can review to better understand what their students know, what they are struggling to understand, and how their thinking has changed over time.

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While there are many effective ways to use a journal as a learning tool, below are five questions that we suggest you consider:

- 1. What is the teacher's relationship with students' journals?** Will you read everything they write? Is it possible for them to keep something private? Will their journals be graded? If so, by what criteria? You can set limits on the degree to which you have access to students' journals. Many teachers establish a rule that if students wish to keep information in their journals private, they should fold the page over or remove the page entirely.
- 2. What is appropriate content for journals?** It is easy for students to confuse a class journal with a diary (or blog) because both formats allow for open-ended writing. Teachers should clarify how the audience and purpose for this writing is distinct from that of writing in a personal diary. To avoid uncomfortable situations, many teachers find it helpful to clarify topics that are not suitable material for journal entries. Also, as mandatory reporters in most school districts, teachers should explain that they are required to take certain steps, such as informing a school official, if students reveal information about possible harm to themselves or another student.

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## Silence is one of the most powerful and underused tools in the classroom.

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- 3. How will journals be evaluated?** Many students admit that they are less likely to share their true thoughts or express questions when they are worried about a grade based on getting the “right” answer or using proper grammar or spelling. Therefore, we suggest that if you choose to grade students’ journals, which many teachers do, you base these grades on criteria such as effort, thoughtfulness, completion, creativity, curiosity, and making connections between the past and the present. Moreover, there are many ways to provide students with feedback on their journals besides traditional grading, such as by writing comments or asking questions.
- 4. What forms of expression can be included in a journal?** Students learn and communicate best in different ways. The journal is an appropriate space to respect different learning styles. Some students may wish to draw their ideas rather than record thoughts in words. Other students may feel most comfortable responding in concept webs and lists instead of prose. When you introduce the journal to students, you might brainstorm different ways that they might express their thoughts.
- 5. How should journal content be publicly shared?** Most Facing History teachers have found that students are best able to express themselves when they believe that their journal is a private space. Therefore, we suggest that information in students’ journals never be publicly shared without the consent of the writer. At the same time, we encourage you to provide multiple opportunities for students to voluntarily share ideas and questions they have recorded in their journals. Some students may feel more comfortable reading from their journals than speaking “off the cuff” in class discussions.

For more information about effective journaling prompts and activities, see [Journals in a Facing History Classroom](#) at [facinghistory.org](http://facinghistory.org).



# Establish a Safe Space for Sensitive Topics

Some topics can feel particularly difficult to address in the classroom—e.g., issues related to race, immigration, and religion. Teachers can help students practice having constructive, civil dialogue, characterized by listening respectfully to multiple perspectives, but sometimes it is helpful to first acknowledge the possible discomfort of participants and reassure them that their feelings are valid and their contributions to the discussion are valuable.

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The following activity is designed to help create a safe space. You can replace the word “race” with whatever sensitive topic you’re focused on.

1. Start with a journal prompt: Tell students that the following writing exercise is a *private* journal entry that they will not be asked to share with anyone, so they should feel free to write their most honest reflection. Have students take several minutes to complete this sentence: “I mostly feel \_\_\_\_\_ when discussing race, because \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. Now that students have gathered their thoughts, tell them that you are going to do a group brainstorm. They should not make “I” statements or share how they feel or what they wrote. Tell students: Let’s put words on the board that represent the feelings that we think may be in the room when we discuss race. At this point, we will just list and not comment on them.
3. Now look at the list. Ask students: What do the words have in common? (*Usually the words are mostly, but maybe not all, negative.*) What else do you notice? (*The words are not just surface observations; they are deeply personal feelings.*) Do you have any other important reflections? (*The words represent a wide and varied range of responses.*) Which of these feelings are most valid? (*They are all valid. You may want to acknowledge that this is a rhetorical question, but it is important to validate everyone’s feelings.*) Where do these feelings come from? (*Personal experiences, the media, stereotypes, etc.*)
4. It’s important for teachers and students to acknowledge that these feelings are in the room and that they need not be afraid of them. Each person should be allowed to enter this conversation wherever he or she is without being judged or shut down. Everyone needs to feel free to participate without fear of being called racist or given any other label.

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# Implement Effective Teaching Strategies

The following teaching strategies can be particularly effective in facilitating discussions about controversial or sensitive topics. These strategies can create space for diverse viewpoints and encourage active listening and consideration of multiple perspectives.

- **Big Paper:**  
Building a Silent Conversation
- **Barometer:**  
Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues
- **Save the Last Word for Me**
- **Four Corners Debate**

Before using any of these strategies in the classroom, it is important to note that implementing specific teaching strategies alone will not produce thoughtful and productive class discussions. It is crucial that teachers carefully consider the questions, readings, or other materials they use to introduce and frame these activities and how those introductory materials connect to heated debates and partisan biases in current events.

Open-ended questions and resources that reflect the complexity and nuance often inherent in contemporary issues tend to lead to the most meaningful learning experiences for students. Questions and resources that lead to specific conclusions or provoke students' existing sensitivities or biases can be counterproductive. Teachers know their students best and should carefully preview any materials that they will use for a class discussion to make sure that they lend themselves to meaningful, civil dialogue.

Additional strategies can be found at [facinghistory.org/teaching-strategies](https://facinghistory.org/teaching-strategies).

# Big Paper

## Building a Silent Conversation

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### Rationale

This discussion strategy uses writing and silence as tools to help students explore a topic in depth. Having a written conversation with peers slows down the thinking process and gives students an opportunity to focus on the views of others. This strategy also creates a visual record of thoughts and questions that can be referred to later. Using the Big Paper strategy can help engage shy students who are not as likely to participate in a verbal discussion.

### Procedure

#### 1. Preparation

First, you need to select the “stimulus”—the material that students will respond to. As the stimulus for a Big Paper activity, teachers have used questions, quotations, historical documents, and excerpts from novels, poetry, or images.

Groups can be given the same stimulus for discussion; however more often, they are given different texts related to the same theme. This activity works best when students are working in pairs or triads. Make sure that all students have a pen or marker. Some teachers have students use different colors to make it easier to see the back-and-forth flow of a conversation. Each group also needs a “big paper” (typically a sheet of poster paper) that can fit a written conversation and added comments. In the middle of the page, tape or write the “stimulus” (image, quotation, excerpt, etc.) that will be used to spark the students’ discussion.

#### 2. The importance of silence

Inform the class that this activity is completed in silence and all communication

is done in writing. Tell students that they will have time to speak in pairs and in large groups later. Before the activity begins, go over all of the instructions and ask students if they have questions. This will avoid questions during the activity and minimize the chance that students will interrupt the silence once it has begun. You can also remind students of their task as they begin each new step.

#### 3. Comment on your Big Paper

Each group receives a Big Paper; each student receives a marker or pen. The groups read the text in silence. After students have finished, they may comment on the text and ask questions of each other in writing on the Big Paper. The written conversation must start on the text but can stray to wherever the students take it. If someone in the group writes a question, another member should address it by writing on the Big Paper. Students can draw lines connecting a comment to a particular question. Make sure students know that more than one of them can write on the Big Paper at the same time. The teacher can determine the length of this step, but it should be at least 15 minutes.

4. **Comment on other Big Papers**

Still working in silence, students leave their partner(s) and walk around reading the other Big Papers. Students bring their marker or pen and can write comments or further questions for thought on other Big Papers. Again, the teacher can determine the length of time for this step based on the number of Big Papers and his or her knowledge of the students.

5. **Return to your own Big Paper**

The silence is broken. The pairs rejoin back at their own Big Paper. They should look at any comments written by others. Now they can have a free, verbal conversation about the text, their own comments, what they read on other papers, and comments

that their fellow students wrote back to them. You might ask students to take out their journals and identify a question or comment that stands out to them at this moment.

6. **Class discussion**

Finally, debrief the process with the large group. The conversation can begin with a simple prompt such as, “What did you learn from doing this activity?” This is the time to delve deeper into the content and use ideas from the Big Papers to bring out students’ thoughts. The discussion can also touch upon the importance and difficulty of staying silent and the level of comfort with this activity.

# Save the Last Word for Me

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## Rationale

This discussion strategy requires all students to participate as active speakers and listeners. Its clearly defined structure helps shy students share their ideas and ensures that frequent speakers practice being quiet. It is often used as a way to help students debrief a reading or film.

## Procedure

### 1. Preparation

Identify a reading or video excerpt that will serve as the catalyst for this activity.

### 2. Students read and respond

Have students read or view the selected text. Ask students to highlight three sentences that particularly stand out for them and to write each sentence on the front of an index card. On the back, they should write a few sentences explaining why they have chosen that quote—what it means to them, reminds them of, etc. They may connect it to something that has happened to them in their own life, to a film or book they saw or read, or to something that has happened in history or is happening in current events.

### 3. Sharing in small groups

Divide students into groups of three, labeling one student A, one B, and the other C. Invite student A to read one of her chosen quotations and talk about why she chose it. Give the student a set amount of time, perhaps a minute, to speak. During that minute, Students B and C listen; they do not interrupt or interject. After the minute,

Student B gets a chance to speak for one minute. He can both expand on Student A's thinking, say what questions it raised for him, provide a different idea, or challenge the thinking of Student A. When Student B talks, Students A and C listen; they do not interrupt or clarify. After Student B has a minute, Student C gets a turn to speak without interruption. Finally, Student A gets one minute to answer questions or respond to the other students' ideas. In this way, Student A gets the "last word."

The intent of this exercise is to create equity in a discussion and for students to practice moments of listening without trying to immediately respond.

Each student should get a chance to start a round of conversation with the quote or phrase they pulled from the text and have the "last word." After each student has had a turn, you may want to open up the class to a larger, freeform discussion in order to process all the structured discussions that the smaller groups had.

# Barometer

## Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues

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### Rationale

This teaching strategy helps students share their opinions by lining up along a continuum to represent their point of view. It is especially useful when trying to discuss an issue about which students have a wide range and variety of opinions.

### Procedure

- 1. Preparation**

Identify a space in the classroom where students can create a line or a U-shape. Place “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree” signs at opposite ends of a continuum in your room. Or you can post a statement and then, at the other end of the line, post its opposite.
- 2. Contracting**

Set a contract for this activity. Since it deals with students literally putting themselves and their opinions on the line, it has the potential for outbursts that result from some not understanding how classmates can hold certain opinions. Reiterate your class rules about respect for the opinions and voices of others and call for them to be honest, but not insulting. Readdress ways to constructively disagree with one another, and require that when offering their opinion or defense of their stance, they speak from the “I” rather than from an accusatory “You.”
- 3. Formulating an opinion**

Give students a few minutes to reflect on a prompt that calls for agreement or disagreement with a particular statement. Facing History teachers often have students respond to the prompt in their journals.
- 4. “Take a stand”**

Ask students to stand on the spot of the line that represents their opinion, telling them that if they stand on either extreme, they are absolute in their agreement or disagreement. They may also stand anywhere in between the two extremes, depending on how much they do or do not agree with the statement.
- 5. Explain positions**

Once students have lined up, ask them to explain why they have chosen to stand where they are. Encourage students to refer to evidence and examples when defending their stance. It is probably best to alternate from one end to the middle to the other end, rather than allowing too many voices from one stance to dominate. After about three or four viewpoints are heard, ask if anyone wishes to move. Encourage students to keep an open mind; they are allowed to move if someone presents an argument that alters where they want to stand on the line. Run the activity until you feel that most or all voices have been heard, making sure that one person does not dominate.
- 6. Debriefing**

There are many ways to debrief this exercise. You can have students to reflect in their journals about how the activity changed or reinforced their original opinion. Or you can chart the main for and against arguments on the board as a whole-class activity.

# Four Corners Debate

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## Rationale

Four Corners Debate is a variation on the Barometer teaching strategy. Similarly, it requires students to show their position on a specific statement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) by standing in a particular corner of the room. This activity elicits the participation of all students by requiring everyone to take a position. Drawing out students' opinions on a topic they are about to study can be a useful warm-up activity. Asking them to apply what they have learned when framing arguments can be an effective follow-through activity.

## Procedure

### 1. Preparation

Label the four corners of the room with signs reading: "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," "strongly disagree." Generate a list of controversial statements related to the material being studied. Statements most likely to encourage discussion typically do not have one correct or obvious answer, elicit nuanced arguments (e.g., "This might be a good idea some of the time, but not all of the time"), and represent respected values on both sides of the debate.

### 2. Introduce statements

Distribute statements and give students the opportunity to respond to them in writing. Many teachers provide a graphic organizer or worksheet that requires students to mark their opinion (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) and then provide a brief explanation.

### 3. Four Corners discussion

After students have considered their personal response to the statements, read one of the statements aloud, and ask students to move to the corner of the room that best represents their opinion. Once students are in their places, ask for volunteers to justify their position. When doing so, they should

refer to evidence from history or sources they've been studying as well as other relevant information from their own experiences. Encourage students to switch corners if someone presents an idea that causes a change of mind. After a representative from each corner has defended his or her position, you can allow students to question each other's evidence and ideas. Before beginning the discussion, remind students about norms for having a respectful, open discussion of ideas.

### 4. Reflection

There are many ways to debrief this exercise. You can have students reflect in their journals about how the activity changed or reinforced their original opinion. Some of their views may have been strengthened by the addition of new evidence and arguments, while others may have changed altogether. It is quite possible that some students will be more confused or uncertain about their views after the Four Corners Debate. While uncertainty can feel uncomfortable, it is an important part of the understanding process and represents an authentic wrestling with moral questions that have no clear right or wrong answers. To clarify ideas shared during the discussion, you can chart the main for and against arguments on the board as a whole-class activity.

# Additional Resources to Foster Civil Discourse

Here are some additional resources to help you foster open, thoughtful, and respectful dialogue in your classroom. Please visit our website, [facinghistory.org](http://facinghistory.org), to learn more about the full range of services we offer for **professional development** and **resources** to support every stage of your career as an educator.

- Subscribe to our blog, **Facing Today**, to hear each week from teachers, students, staff, and supporters with practical tips about using Facing History in the classroom. Some related posts to review include:
  - **How Teachers Can Help Students Make Sense of Today's Political and Social Tensions**
  - **8 Components of a Reflective Classroom**
  - **Hope Will Never Be Silent**
  - **Creating Space for Student Voices**
  - **Teaching in a Time of Terrorism**
  - **After Eric Garner: One School's Courageous Conversation**
- Help students become responsible consumers and producers of news and information by understanding the role of confirmation bias in how they interpret news and information, weighing the impact of social media on the traditional news cycle, learning how to verify sources of information, and considering their responsibilities as citizens in a democracy. Explore **Facing Ferguson: News Literacy in a Digital Age**.
- Bolster conversations about difficult societal issues by approaching them through the lens of history and literature. Not only can this help students better understand the roots and underlying nuances of these issues, but such an approach can also provide some distance to explore issues of human behavior in the past while allowing time for students to make connections to our world today. Facing History's core case studies integrate history and human behavior in order to help students think critically about the choices they make every day and about how they want to participate in the world. Examples include:
  - **Choices in Little Rock**
  - **The Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy**
  - **Holocaust and Human Behavior**
  - **Teaching Mockingbird**

## Find Out More

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