

TAKE A SIDE



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 of opinions. Engaging in a take a side activity can be an effective pre-writing exercise before an essay assignment because it gets many arguments out on the table. It supports many of the Common Core standards that focus on supporting ideas with reasons and evidence.(adapted from Swiers, 2014)

Steps for the Strategy

Preparation

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

Contracting

Set a contract for this activity. Since it deals with students literally putting themselves and their

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opinions on the line, it has potential for outbursts which result from some not understanding how classmates can hold whatever opinion they hold. Reiterate your class rules about respect for the opinions and voices of others, and call for them to be honest, but not insulting. Re-address ways to constructively disagree with one another, and require that when offering their opinion or defense of their stance, that they speak from the "I," rather than from an accusatory "You."

Formulating an opinion

Give students a few minutes to reflect on a prompt or prompts which call for agreement or disagreement with a particular statement. Often Facing History teachers have students respond to the prompt in their journals.

“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.

Explain positions

Once students have lined themselves up, ask the students to explain why they have chosen to stand where they are standing. 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 most or all voices have been heard, making sure that no one person dominates.

Debriefing

There are many ways you can 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.

Variations:

- **Post-it notes :** Draw a continuum on the board. Ask students to place a post-it note on the spot along the continuum that represents their opinion. Then have students discuss what they notice. This variation is less about individuals explaining their point of view than about illustrating the range of agreement or disagreement in the class.
- **Presenting different perspectives:** Can be used to present different perspectives of historical figures, schools of thought, and literary characters. Assign students a perspective to represent. Then give them time to research or study the ideas of this person

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or group as it relates to the question being studied. When you frame a statement, ask students to stand on the line that represents how their assigned individual or group would respond. For example, you could use this activity to show how different philosophers or groups have responded to the statement: Individual freedom is more important than protecting the needs of the larger community.