



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

TUG FOR TRUTH

"Every person that you meet knows something you don't; learn from them."

—H. Jackson Brown Jr

OVERVIEW

Students will evaluate the arguments in support of a claim being true or false, and pose questions that will help them make a more informed decision about the claim.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When evaluating a controversial claim
- To help students appreciate the complexity of some claims
- To encourage the practice of intellectual humility while learning

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- White board/chalk board
- Marker/chalk
- Light rope (optional)
- Tape (optional)
- Post-its (optional)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Evaluate the validity of a controversial claim
- Formulate questions that can help them test the possible limitations of a claim
- Identify gaps in their own understanding

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self Awareness
- Relationships Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on a controversial claim. Consider the evidence that supports the claim, then consider the evidence that doesn't support the claim. Now, begin to pose a few questions that would help you better understand whether the claim is true or false. Can you reach a verdict on whether the claim is true or false? How would you make your decision?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

Intellectual humility includes an awareness of one's own knowledge limitations and a willingness to seek input from others to fill one's knowledge gaps. The following exercise helps students engage in recognizing the limits of their knowledge and practice asking questions.

DIRECTIONS

- Identify a question of truth — a controversial claim that something is true or false — where you know there is some evidence on both sides that students can bring forward. Below are a few topic options.
 - Private schools are better than public schools.
 - Democracy is the best form of government.

- Social media usage has a negative effect on adolescents' mental health
- All people should become vegetarian.
- Genetically modified foods are good.
- Ask students if they have an opinion about the claim (It's okay not to have one.) Remind students that to fully evaluate a claim, one has to be willing to consider all the evidence.
- Draw a tug-of-war diagram on the board (or tape a piece of rope on the wall) and use post-it notes as evaluation tools. Explain that students can add two things to their post-it notes:
 - EVIDENCE: One option is to provide specific evidence to support or counter the claim—tugs in the Yes/True direction or the No/False direction.
 - QUESTIONS: The other option is to add a question about the tug of war itself—a question that asks for more information or poses a “what if.” For example, what if we reduced social media use to one hour daily or ate only genetically modified foods what would the results be? What else might we need to know?
- After students have posted their evidence or questions, consider who may be the best person you could reach out to to help answer the questions posed. Remind students that we all have limits in our knowledge and that it's important to recognize those limits so that we can seek help from others and make more informed decisions. Then, as a class, try to answer each question with the resources you have.
- Finish the lesson by asking students for new evidence they have about whether the claim is true. Can we decide now? Do some people lean one way and some the other? Is the best answer in a “gray area”—most of the time true but not always, or half the time? How would we come to an agreement if we had to?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were students engaged in the exercise? How might you modify this practice to ensure all students are participating?
- Have you noticed any changes in how students evaluate controversial claims?
- How might continuing this practice help shape the learning environment?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Research](#) suggests that children high in intellectual humility are better able to assess the limits of their own knowledge and to ask questions to gain new insights.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

[Intellectually humble](#) individuals are not afraid to acknowledge when they do not know something: instead, they ask questions when they do not understand. Furthermore, [intellectual humility](#) is related to a greater willingness to hear others perspectives on a topic.

Intellectual humility allows students to engage more deeply with material and with each other. Instead of trying to pretend they know everything or refusing to listen to each others' perspectives, students with intellectual humility can help create a safe space for learning while challenging each other's perspectives in a respectful manner.

SOURCE

The Tug for Truth thinking routine was developed by [Project Zero](#), a research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.