

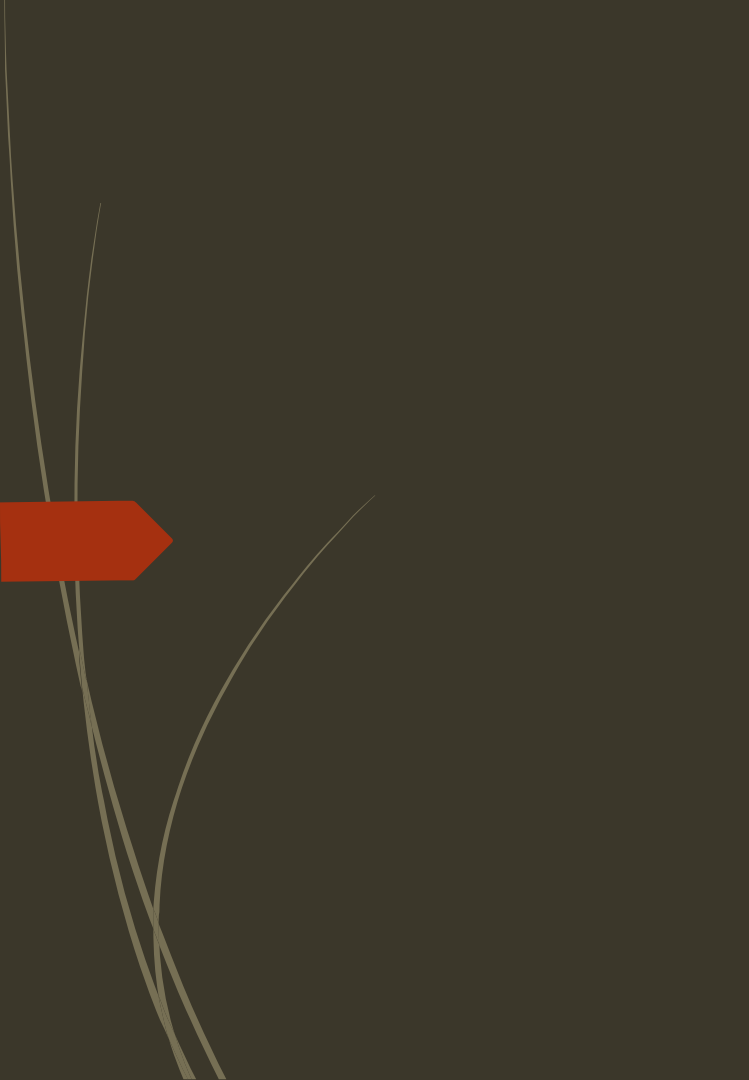
A Republic,  
if WE can  
keep it...

*Contentious  
Topics:*

*How Civil  
Discourse Should  
Guide Your  
Curriculum to  
Build Community*

**You will receive a link to the  
presentation at the end**





**Our republic is supported  
by a democratic process.  
For that process to work,  
then we must be willing to  
work and we must be  
ready and willing address  
ALL topics.**



## Objectives

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Getting Comfortable with Discomfort

---

Why This Can No Longer Be Avoided

---

Why This is the Responsibility of Schools

---

Perspective and Language Matters

---

Building a Culture

---

What Type of Questions are We Asking

---

A Big Picture Approach

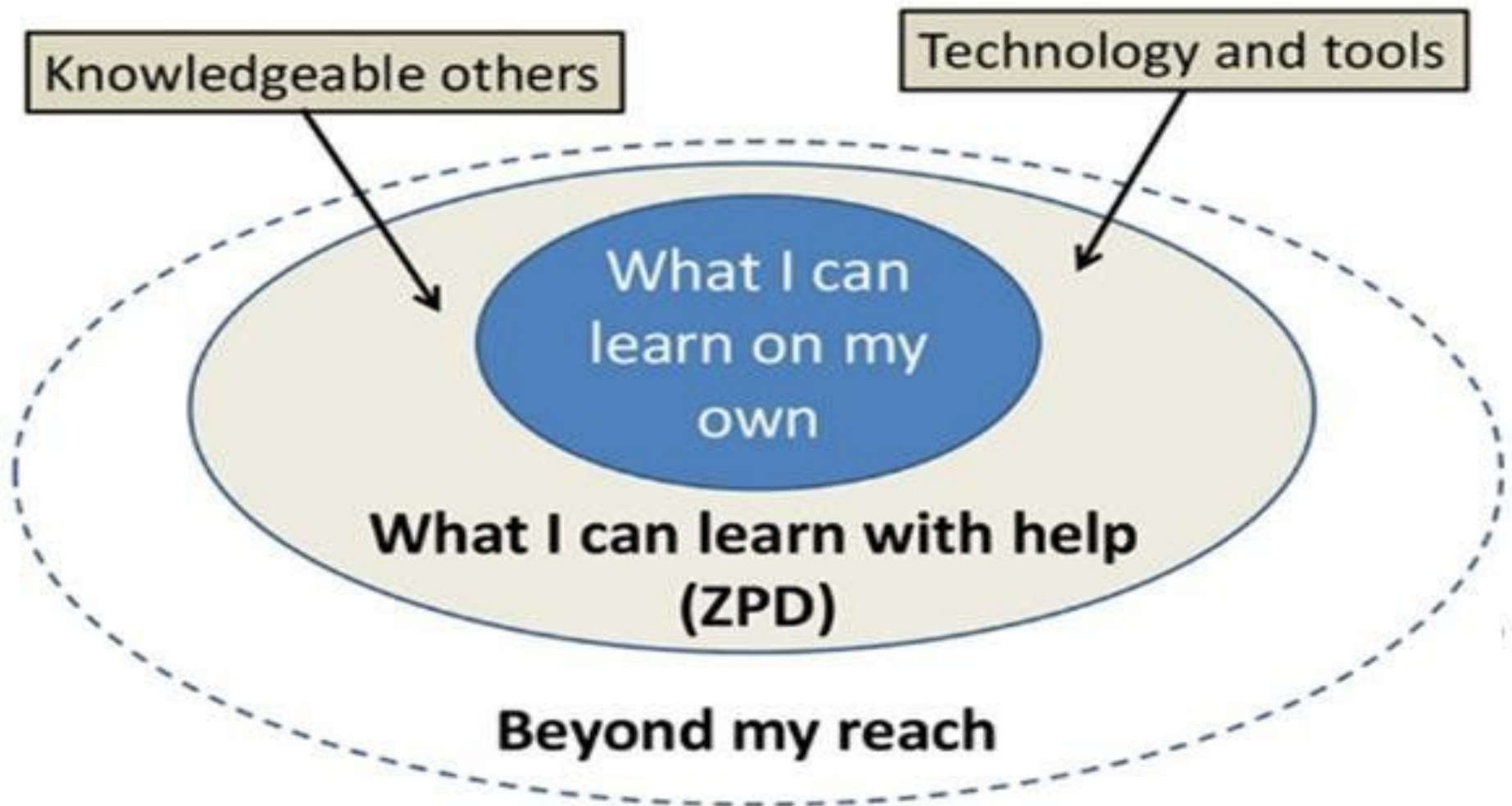
Knowledgeable others

Technology and tools

What I can  
learn on my  
own

What I can learn with help  
(ZPD)

Beyond my reach



## MEDICAL BOARD

Five people suffer from a rare and, to this point, incurable disease. Their quality of life is profoundly affected which makes day to day responsibilities very difficult. The doctors have finally come up with the only medicine that can cure it. However, right now they have only enough to help one person. If you had to choose, which one of the following people would you designate as the recipient?

- 1. Male, age 23.** Star quarterback. Spends summers teaching football to disadvantaged city kids to give them the same chance he got.
- 2. Female, age 15.** Only child in family. Sweet, pleasant, has many friends. Plans to be a nurse and works hard in school.
- 3. Male, age 36.** Extremely rich, has given millions of dollars to charity. Now he says if he gets the medicine, he will build a special clinic for people who get this disease in the future.
- 4. Male, age 42.** Has five kids, aged 4 to 12. No wife or other relatives. Works two jobs to keep the family together. If he cannot care for his kids, they will have to go to foster homes.
- 5. Female, age 56.** Brilliant scientist. Has made many important medical discoveries. When she got sick, she was working on a major medical breakthrough.



## Tough Discussions

What did you decide?

Would the group be able to reach a consensus?

Could you see students having troubles accepting a final answer?

What would you do to support this type of discussion?



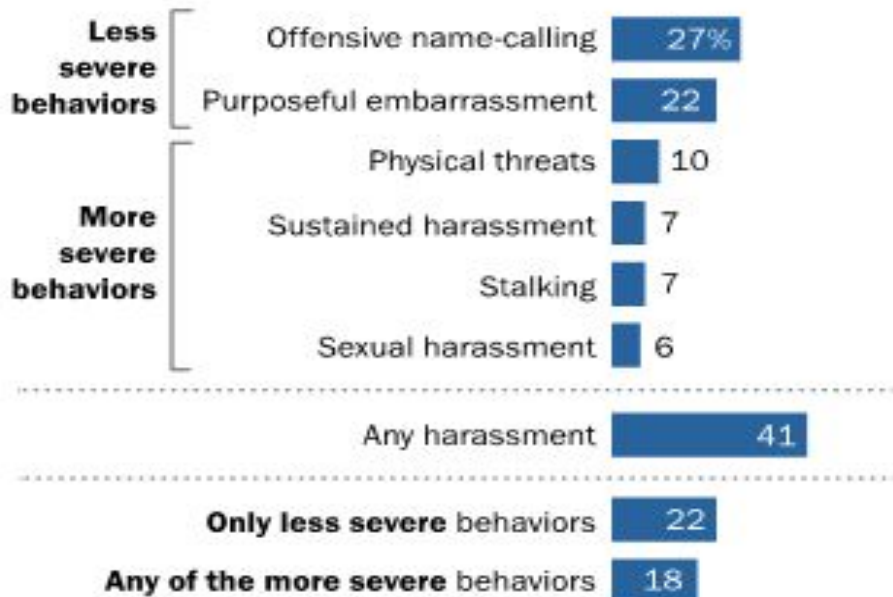
**“Democracy is faith fueled. It only works when enough of us believe it works.”**

**Eric Liu**



## Roughly four-in-ten Americans have personally experienced online harassment

% of U.S. adults who have experienced \_\_\_\_\_ online

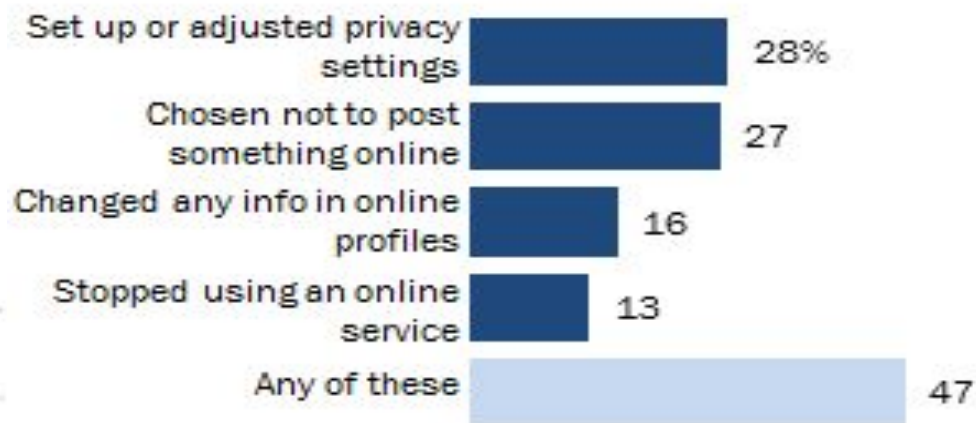


Source: Survey conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.  
"Online Harassment 2017"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## More than a quarter of Americans have chosen to not post something online after seeing harassment of others

% of U.S. adults who have \_\_\_\_\_ after witnessing harassing behaviors directed toward others online



Note: Total may not add to 100% because respondents could select multiple options.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017  
"Online Harassment 2017"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Those who have faced severe forms of online harassment differ in experiences, reactions, attitudes

Among those who have personally experienced online harassment that ...

% who say their online harassment was a result of ...

Does not include severe behaviors      Includes severe behaviors



% who say their online harassment caused them ...



% who say they have ever ... after witnessing online harassment



Note: Severe behaviors include stalking, physical threats, sustained harassment and sexual harassment. Less severe behaviors include offensive name-calling and purposeful efforts to embarrass someone.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.  
"Online Harassment 2017"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

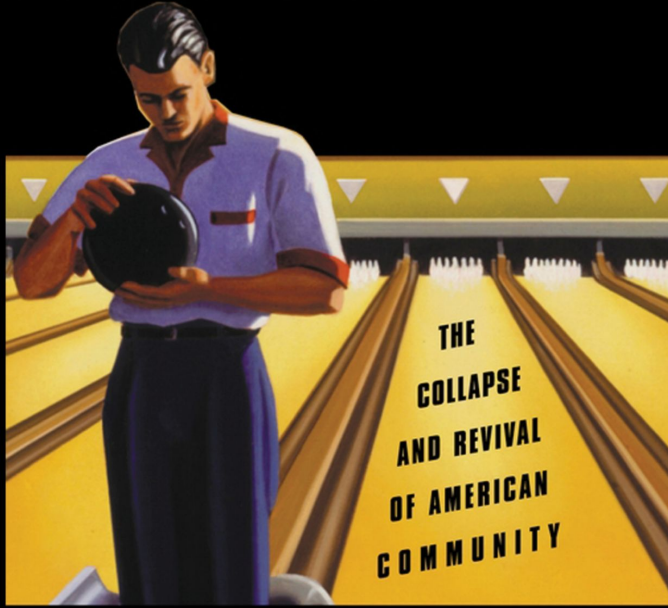
**facebook  
fights**



This isn't because we spent TOO much time talking about contentious issues when we were younger...

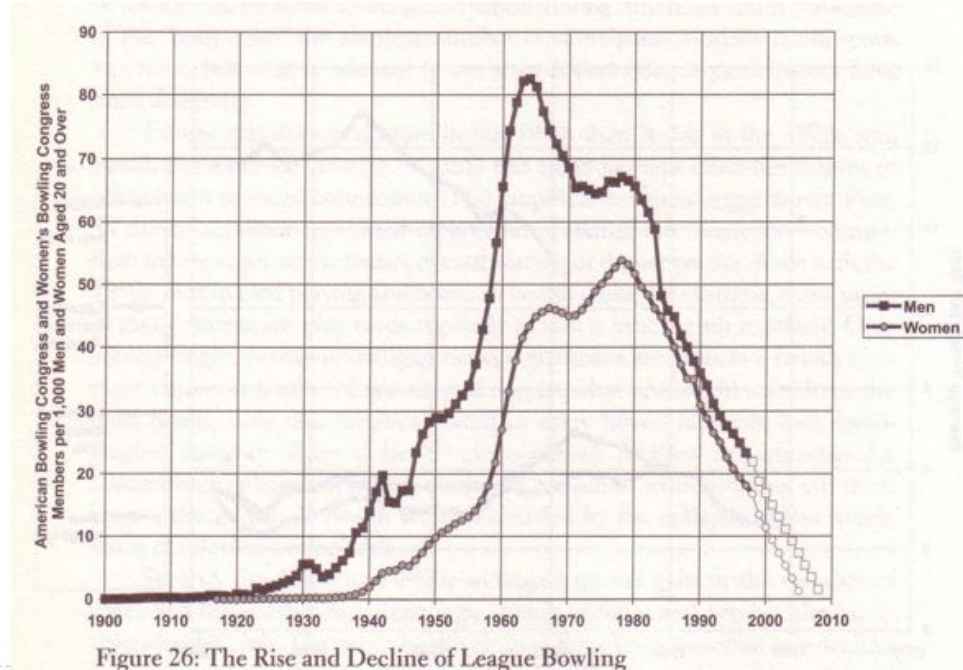


# BOWLING ALONE



Robert D. Putnam

## Rise and Decline of League Bowling





**Schools are  
one of the  
few shared  
spaces left in  
our society.**



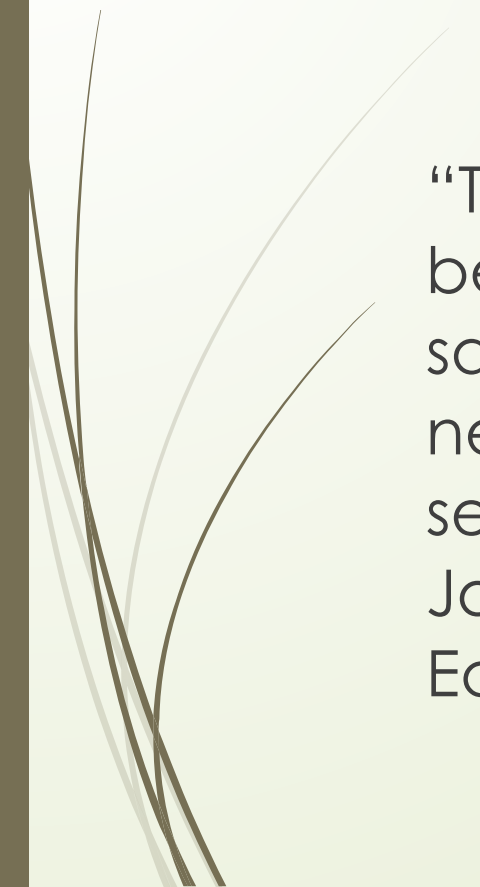


## This is not new....

Back in 1848, Horace Mann declared “But to avoid such a catastrophe, shall all teaching, relative to the nature of our government, be banished from our schools; and **shall our children be permitted to grow up in entire ignorance of the political history of their country?** In the schools of a republic, shall the children be left without any distinct knowledge of the nature of a republican government; or **only with such knowledge as they may pick up from angry political discussions,** or from party newspapers; from caucus speeches, or Fourth of July orations,--the Apocrypha of Apocrypha?” **Even then, educational leaders were worried about students getting caught up in the rhetoric of angry politics!**



## Even Dewey Agrees!

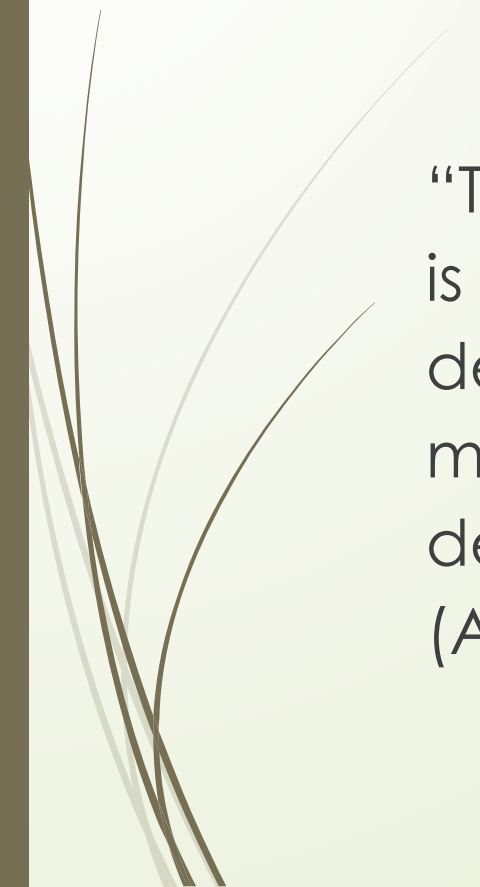


“The purpose of education has always been to every one, in essence, the same—to give the young the things they need in order to develop in an orderly, sequential way into members of society.”  
John Dewey, “Individual Psychology and Education.” (The Philosopher, 12, 1934)





## Common Theme



“The main purpose of the American school is to provide for the fullest possible development of each learner for living morally, creatively, and productively in a democratic society.”

(ASCD/Educational Leadership - 1957).



# Age-Appropriate Microcosm

“The best forms of character education are those that enlist students as active, influential participants in creating a caring and just environment in the classroom and in the school at large...The challenge is for the school to become a microcosm in which students practice age-appropriate versions of the roles they must face in later life—and deal with the related problems and complications.”  
(Sept. 12, 2001, issue of Education Week).

Perspective matters ...



And perspective differs!

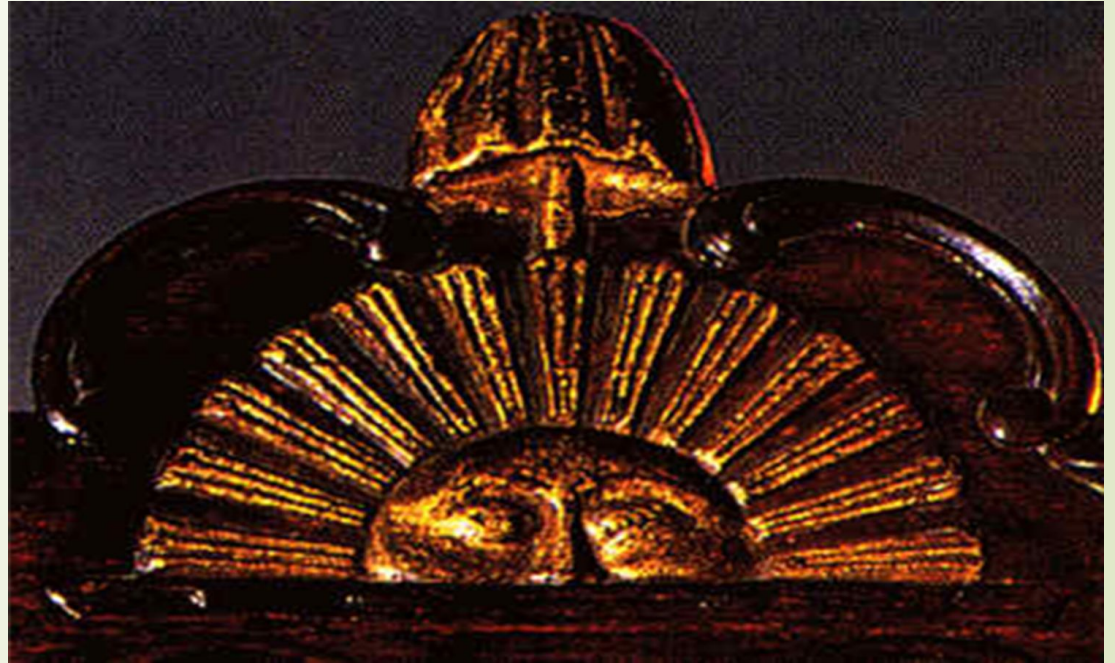
— Nate River



## The Rising Sun Armchair

George Washington used this chair for nearly three months of the Federal Convention's continuous sessions. James Madison reported Benjamin Franklin saying:

***"I have often looked at that behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting. But now I... know that it is a rising...sun."***



Is our sun setting? Or are we rising in a new day?



**Valarie Kaur**



**“Somehow we  
weathered  
and witnessed  
a nation that  
isn’t broken,  
but simply  
unfinished”**

**Amanda Gorman**

**The Hill We Climb**

# WORDS

words have  
direct and  
indirect impacts

# MATTER

on the people  
who hear or  
read them



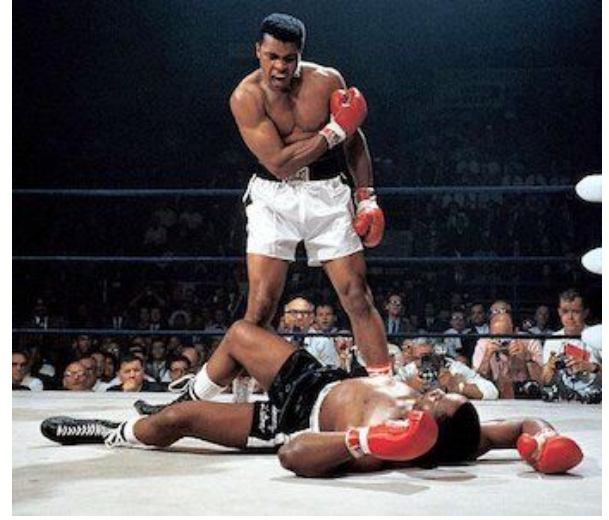


# Contentious vs. Controversial

**What's the  
Difference**



HEAR ME



**What is Your Goal?**

## STUDENTS ENGAGING COLLABORATIVELY

1

### **Discourse:**

Purpose - To share information without feedback or interaction.

Students - Share what they are thinking or have researched without reacting to others or worrying about competing views or how it is related to what others have said.

Support - No specific structures needed to ensure others are being heard or determining a winner or next steps.

### **Diatribes:**

Purpose - To share information in a forcible, bitter, and potential abusive manner to the listener.

***Not recommended for classroom use when talking about contentious topics.***

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### **Dialogue:**

Purpose - Sharing of information is collaborative to build understanding of all participants.

Students - Share what they are thinking including research and reactions to what others have said.

Structure - Participate as needed while allowing for appropriate feedback about other ideas/opinions in an attempt to creatively explore issues, find common ground, and for all voices to feel heard.

### **Discussion:**

Purpose - Sharing of information is semi-collaborative in order to reach a consensus about the question being discussed.

Students - Share what they are thinking including research and reactions as to why one answer may be the strongest in order to convince others.

Structure - Ensure all voices heard and then move students towards narrowing down top choices through formal or informal voting as campaigning continues until agreement reached about which answer is the best one.

### **Debate:**

Purpose - Sharing of information is competitive in order to show that your point of view is superior to the other/others.

Students - Share what they are thinking framed to emphasize their side as better or the other side as worse in order to defeat the other side(s) head to head.

Structure - Opposing or limited point of views are presented usually with teams alternating responses that are traditionally composed of new information and rebuttals to what the other side has said until time runs out and one side is declared the winner.

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## STUDENTS ENGAGING COMPETITIVELY



WHO CARES

“Part of the problem stems from the fact that facts, even a lot of facts, do not constitute reality. Reality is what forms after we filter, arrange, and prioritize those facts and marinate them in our values and traditions.

Reality is personal.”

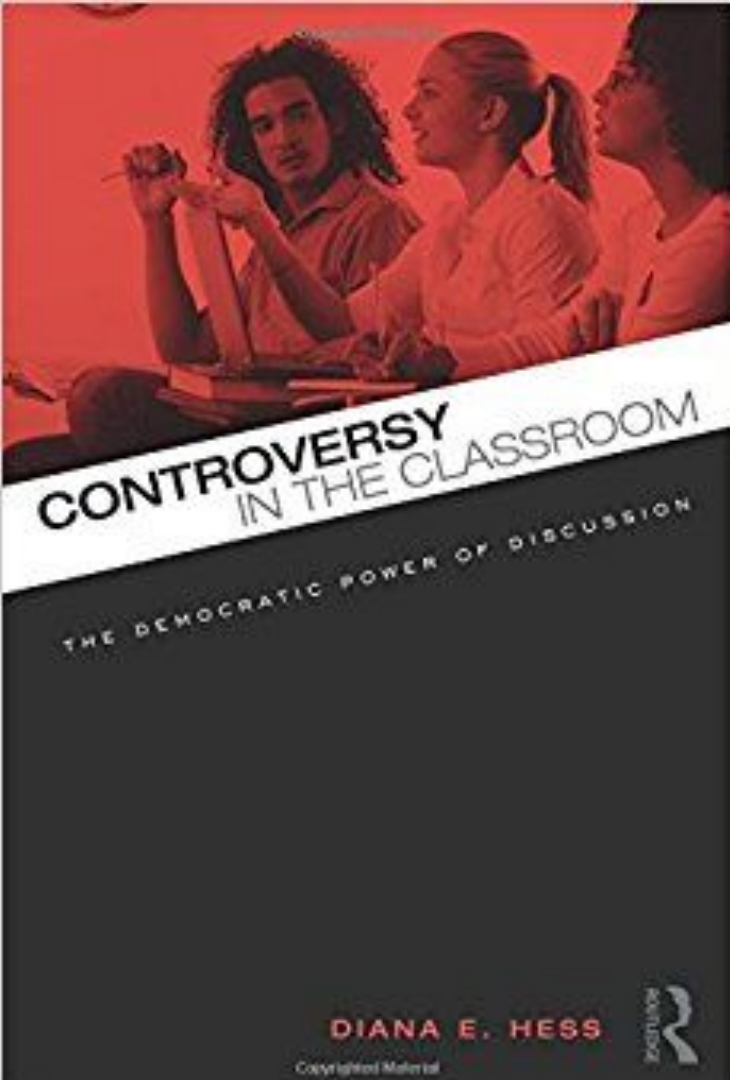
rooke Gladstone

B

## The Trouble With Reality

***“Part of our job is to teach young people how to talk with one another, especially with people who have differing views.”***  
***Dr. Diana Hess***

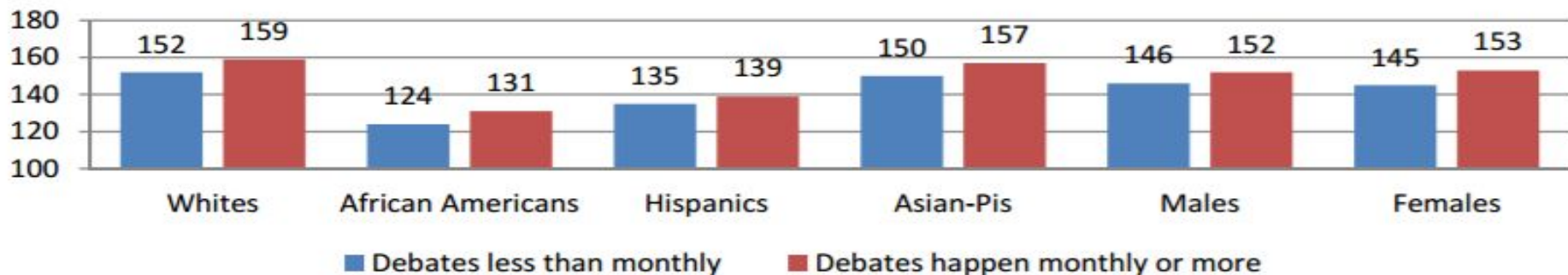




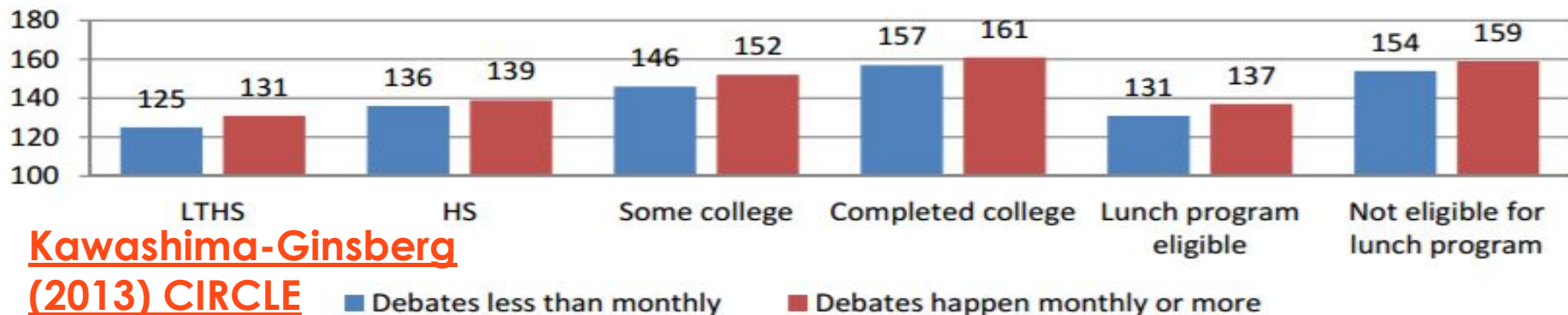
# Controversy in the Classroom

*[S]chools have not just the right, but also the obligation, to create an atmosphere of intellectual and political freedom that uses genuine public controversies to help students discuss and envision political possibilities. Addressing public controversies in schools not only is more educative than quashing or ignoring differences, it also enhances the quality of decision-making by ensuring that multiple and competing views about controversial political issues are aired, fairly considered, and critically evaluated.*

**12th Grade NAEP Civics Score by Frequency of Debates and Interactive Discussions (2010)**



**12th Grade NAEP Civics Score by Frequency of Debates and Interactive Discussions (2010)**



**Kawashima-Ginsberg**  
**(2013) CIRCLE**



**SO WHAT'S THE  
PROBLEM?**

# Legal Rulings

Teachers face particular challenges when they are teaching political or controversial topics in classrooms. They must navigate a narrow passage between delivering the curriculum as required by their local board of education and sharing their own personal views and other information, while also abiding by board regulations regarding content and delivery. In addition, they must deliver the curriculum without attempting to indoctrinate students with their own personal beliefs, particularly on religious, political, and controversial topics.

Teachers cannot let their personal beliefs interfere with their obligation to deliver the school's curriculum, and they may not hijack the curriculum or use their position as teacher as an opportunity to inculcate students to their personal beliefs.

## Legal Rulings (cont)

The school district has the right and responsibility to set the curriculum and, within the delivery of that curriculum, teacher speech can be regulated.

School districts may restrict curricular speech by setting forth what teachers must or may not use as part of delivering the curriculum. While many districts give teachers the latitude to select instructional materials, others require them to abide by rules prescribing or prohibiting certain texts, materials, and instructional techniques. If teachers violate these rules, they may be subject to discipline.

*School Districts Control Teachers' Classroom Speech*

By Julie Underwood

SO NOW WHAT?

“See their  
wound  
instead of the  
manifestation  
to lash out.”

Baratunde Thurston



**Can we be opponents instead  
of enemies?**

**Opponents can become allies.  
Enemies are permanent.**

**Valarie Kaur**



**“Society  
becomes how  
you behave.”**


**Eric Liu**



A good example  
is the best  
sermon

So let us begin anew -  
remembering on both sides that  
civility is not a sign of  
weakness, and sincerity is  
always subject to proof  
- John Fitzgerald Kennedy





*If we don't actively engage students in contentious conversations that our society is currently struggling with, then what type of citizens are we preparing them to be?*


***If not us...who?  
If not now...when?***

**LET'S START AT THE VERY  
BEGINNING....**



**A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START!**

makeameme.org



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



# Facing History and Ourselves

FOSTERING CIVIL DISCOURSE

## Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

1. Create a safe, respectful, and supportive tone in your classroom
2. Prepare yourself
3. Find out what students already know or have experienced about the topic
4. Compile the students' questions and examine them together
5. Make connections
6. Have students investigate and learn more
7. Explore students' opinions and promote dialogue
8. Be responsive to feelings and values
9. Make home connections

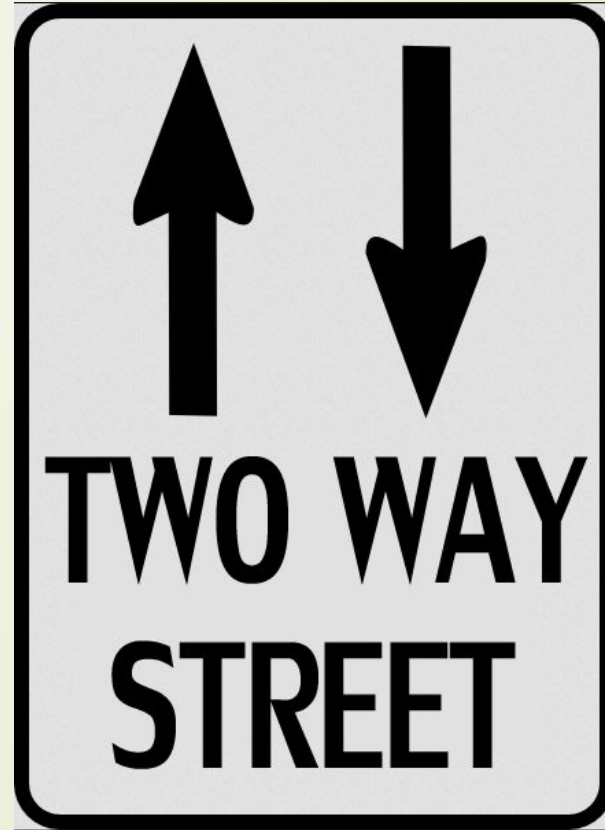
[Original Article](#)

# Student Voice

When setting the tone, include the students in creating a classroom contract. They are the ones that have to abide by the rules, so make sure they are involved.

“Challenge the idea, not the person”

[Teasing vs. Bullying](#)



As students in a school community, we will model good citizenship! We will maintain a safe environment where we can explore—and disagree on—important topics.

We will:



**Call the candidates by their names.** We won't use nicknames that mock or insult people.

**Be kind and respect each other.** We will disagree with ideas, but will not criticize each other for what we think.

**Be curious and open-minded.** When we disagree, we will say, "Why do you think that?" instead of "You're wrong."

**Speak up.** We'll remind each other about our contract when we hear unfair words about the candidates, groups of people or classmates.

**Explain what we're thinking.** When we voice an opinion, we'll give facts and reasons.

**Get involved.** We will talk to adults and others about the candidates, the

issues and why we feel the way we do. We realize that having respectful conversations with each other (whether we agree or not) is important to being a good citizen.

**Think critically.** When faced with TV, social media or other messages about the election, we will analyze them for facts and seek to learn more about the content.

**Signed,** \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Date

- 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.





# Batter Up!

Slow Pitch....





# How to Approach



Empirical

vs



Policy/Political

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**What's the  
Bottom Line ?**

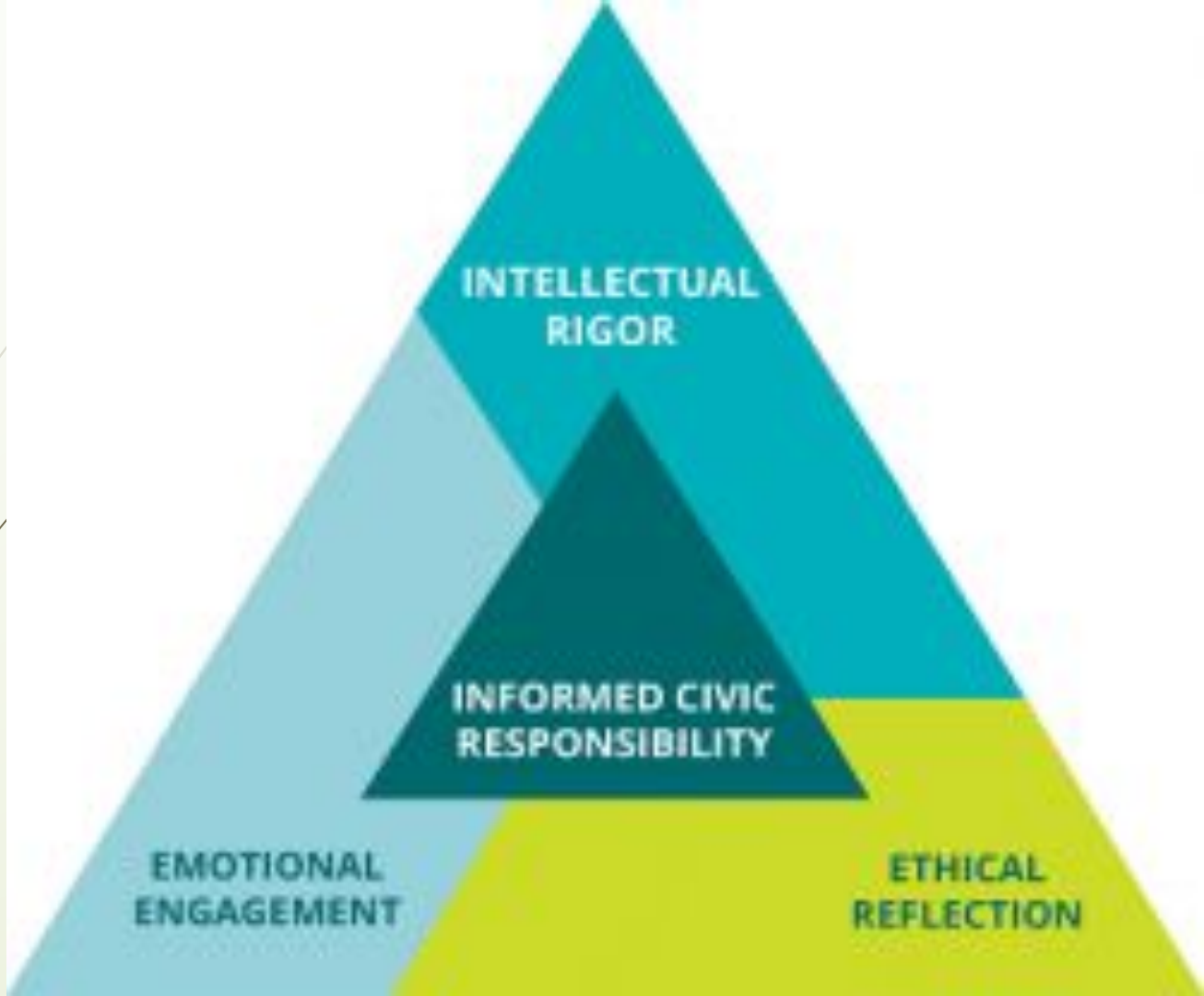
# Give Them A Chance

Like anything else, students need practice to get better at the skills of making reasoned arguments.

- Maine DOE - [Courageous Conversations about Contentious Topics](#) webpage.
- Learning for Justice has a middle school lesson called [Civil Discourse In The Classroom](#).
- Facing History and Ourselves has several ways for students to share ideas in their [Fostering Civil Discourse - A Guide for Classroom Conversations](#).



NEXT STEPS





## The Bigger Picture & Next Steps

What students are doing in the classroom is only part of the bigger picture.

- Classroom Content
- Curriculum Review
  - Diverse Books
- Self, Student, and Staff Reflection
  - Courageous Conversations

[MDOE DEI Website](#)

# The Political Classroom

Diana Hess & Paula McAvoy

- [Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance Blog - Polarized Classrooms](#)
- [The Political Classroom](#)

In their new book, *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*, Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy argue that schools are, and ought to be, political sites—places that engage students in deliberations about questions that ask, “How should we live together?”

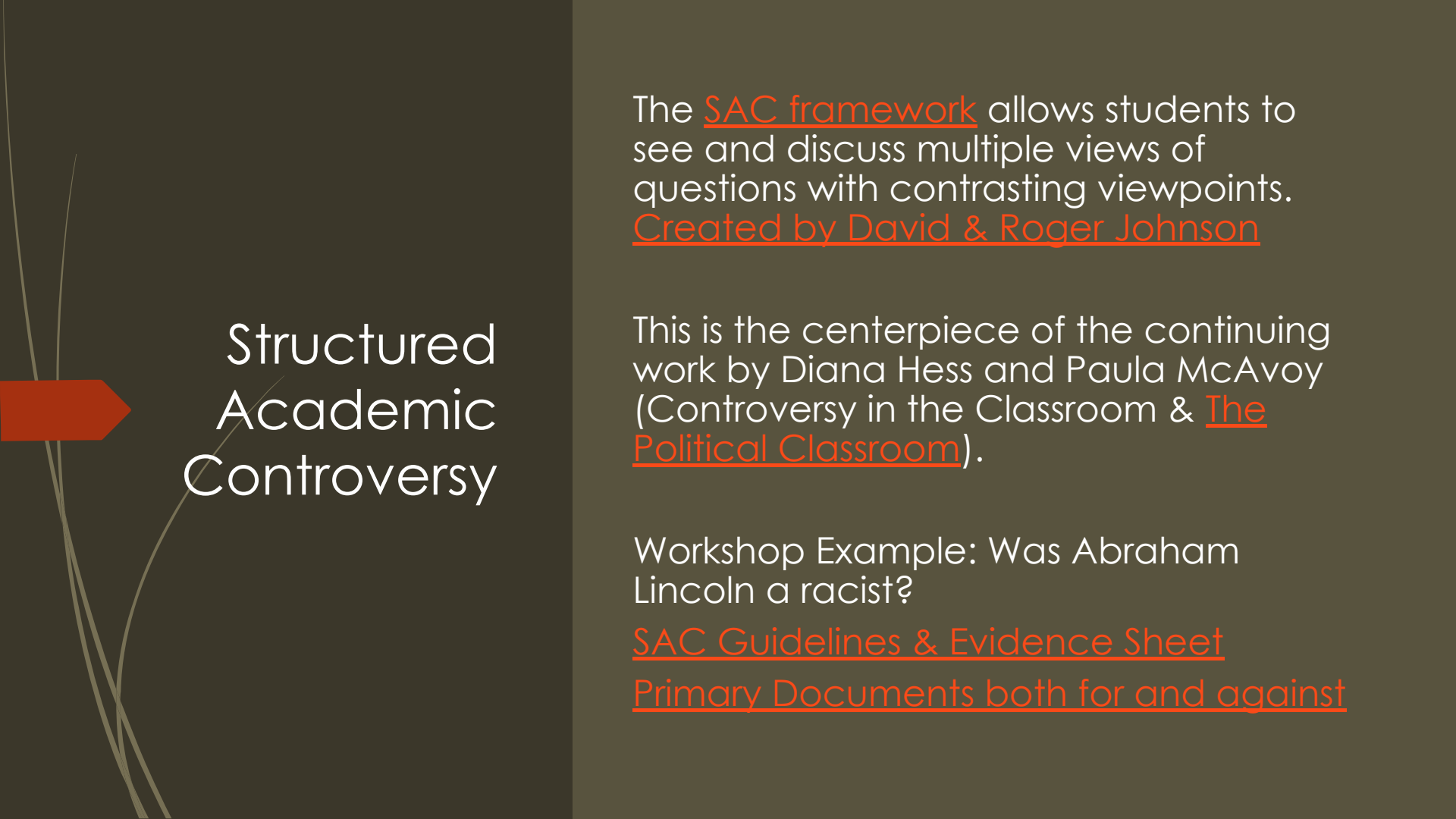
In the book Hess and McAvoy thoroughly explore:

- what good practice looks like in the political classroom,
- findings about what students experience and learn in these classes,
- why this work is particularly challenging (and exciting) in today’s political climate, and
- the ethical dilemmas that arise when teachers engage students in deliberations about political issues.

**Winner of the 2016 American Educational Research Association's Outstanding Book Award!**  
**Winner of the 2017 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education!**







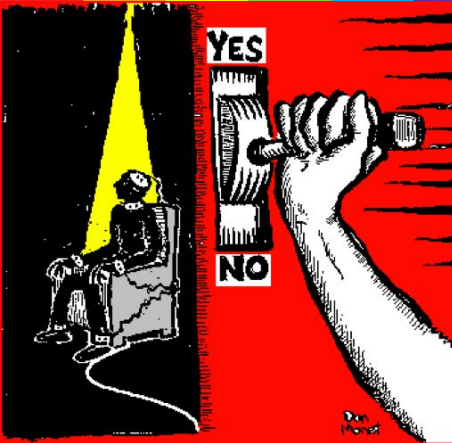
## Structured Academic Controversy

The SAC framework allows students to see and discuss multiple views of questions with contrasting viewpoints.  
Created by David & Roger Johnson


This is the centerpiece of the continuing work by Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy (Controversy in the Classroom & The Political Classroom).

Workshop Example: Was Abraham Lincoln a racist?

SAC Guidelines & Evidence Sheet  
Primary Documents both for and against



<http://www.procon.org>



# Arguments Are Good

[Home page](#)

[Argument Maps](#)

[Puzzles](#)





Are you ready  
to “push” and  
to “breathe”?



