

A stylized, semi-transparent figure in a martial arts pose, possibly a Tai Chi or Taijiquan form, is centered in the background. The figure is composed of smooth, flowing lines and is rendered in a light orange or pinkish hue that blends with the background gradient. The figure's head is a simple circle, and its body is a series of curved, overlapping shapes that suggest movement and balance.

DEBATING GUIDEBOOK

HOW TO CREATE CURRICULUM-BASED DEBATES

ALL BELTS

MODES



This resource helps students to develop the two inter-related aspects of Tongue Fu Talking™: **Explorer Mode**, which supports deep thinking and collaborative discussion, and **Presenter Mode**, which focuses on confident, purposeful expression.



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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Debate: Beyond Winning Arguments

Traditional, adversarial debating often rewards those who speak the loudest or argue most forcefully. While it may sharpen quick thinking or rhetorical flair, it rarely deepens understanding. In such formats, the goal is to defeat an opponent, not to explore ideas, consider alternative viewpoints, or develop a nuanced understanding of complex issues. For many students—especially those who are less confident, neurodivergent, or developing their language skills—this kind of debate can feel exclusionary, performative, and disconnected from meaningful learning.

The Tongue-Fu Debating Framework takes a different path. It positions debate not as a contest, but as a tool for reasoning, reflection and subject learning. Structured progression allows students to build the skills of expressing opinions, supporting them with evidence, listening carefully to others, and engaging respectfully with opposing viewpoints. In doing so, debate becomes a pedagogical strategy: a way to think more deeply, speak more clearly, and learn more effectively.

Rather than asking, “Who won?”, this framework encourages us to ask, “What did we learn?”

A Framework for Thinking, Speaking and Learning

The Tongue Fu Talking™ Debating Framework develops students’ spoken reasoning through a carefully structured progression. Rather than introducing debating as a one-off event or performance, it supports students to build skill and confidence over time—from stating simple opinions to delivering structured, persuasive arguments.

Progression is mapped through a belt system, beginning with White Belt foundations and culminating in Black Belt mastery. At each stage, students develop the ability to:

- Express opinions clearly and support them with reasons
- Use evidence drawn from curriculum content
- Engage with opposing views in a respectful, logical way
- Refine their ideas through structured dialogue

A Scaffolded Approach

Importantly, the framework includes a wide range of scaffolds and adaptations to ensure all students can participate meaningfully, including those who are neurodivergent, developing their speech and language, or reluctant to speak in front of others. Support tools such as sentence stems, discussion prompts, debate ladders and visual planning templates make structured talk accessible without diluting its challenge.





Debate in Tongue Fu Talking™ is not positioned as a standalone activity or contest. Instead, it is used across the curriculum as a way to deepen learning. Students might debate the causes of a historical event, the interpretation of a poem, or a scientific ethical dilemma. In doing so, they are not only developing oracy, but also reinforcing subject knowledge and cognitive flexibility.

In this resource

What follows is a step-by-step journey through the Tongue Fu Talking™ Debating Framework, structured around four progressive belt levels: White, Green, Brown and Black. Each level introduces new debating functions, linked to curriculum content and supported by inclusive scaffolds. Cross-reference tables show you how each debating function links to the **Disciplines** and **Practices** of Tongue Fu Talking™.



PROGRESSION THROUGH THE BELT SYSTEM

Belt Level	Main Focus	Core Debating Functions
 WHITE	Introduction to structured reasoning and perspective-taking.	Stating an opinion, providing a reason, giving an example.
 GREEN	Building structured discussions and recognising counterarguments.	Expanding reasons, introducing an opposing view, developing basic rebuttals.
 BROWN	Formal debates with structured argumentation and rebuttals.	Strengthening reasoning, using evidence and logical counterarguments.
 BLACK	Engaging in high-level competitive debates.	Persuasive techniques, rhetorical precision, cross-examination, and strategic argumentation.






WHITE BELT





White Belt: Foundations of Debate

Aspect	Details
Goal	Build confidence in speaking, forming simple opinions, and giving reasons.
Debate Functions	Stating an Opinion: I think that... / I believe... Providing a Reason: Because... / It is important because... Giving an Example: For example... / An example is...



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Adaptations for Students with Additional Needs	<p>Neurodivergent students – Use visual symbols to pair with sentence stems (e.g., a “thumbs up” icon for opinions).</p> <p>Reluctant speakers – Structured turn-taking through traffic light cards creates predictability and confidence.</p> <p>Students with speech & language needs – Provide modelled sentence stems with opportunities for repetition.</p>
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White Belt: Debate Planning Template

Debate Stage	Guiding Prompts	Student Notes
Topic/Question	What are we debating?	Example: Is it better to live by the sea or in the city?
















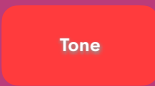

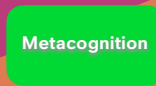
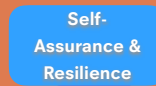
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Listening to Others	What did my partner say?	My partner thinks...
Final Thought	Do I still agree with my first opinion?	Yes/No, because...





Links to the Tongue Fu Talking™ Practices

Debate Stage	Discipline(s)	Practice(s)
My Opinion	   	   
Final Thought	   	  
		   

 **SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK**

-  THE STANCE
-  THE FLOW
-  THE MIND
-  THE BOND





White Belt: Support Scaffolds




Sentence Stems

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Sentence Stem Support	Provides structured sentence starters for	Display in the classroom, model in discussions, and encourage repetition



Debate Buddy

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Debate Buddy Support	Pairing students for low-pressure practice before	Students rehearse their points with a buddy before sharing with a larger



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Traffic Light Cards	Visual cues to manage speaking, listening, and summarising.	Students hold up cards to signal their role in a discussion.
Colours & Meaning	<i>Green = Speak, Yellow = Listen, Red = Summarise.</i>	Encourage students to rotate roles and reflect on their participation.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Use large print, tactile cards, or gesture-based alternatives for students with visual impairments or sensory needs.	Allow pointing to a card instead of speaking for students with speech difficulties.

Talking Object	A physical object (e.g., soft toy, ball) passed around to indicate whose turn it is to speak.	Only the person holding the object can speak, reinforcing turn-taking and active listening.
Example Objects	<i>Soft toy, baton, small ball.</i>	Choose a familiar classroom item that feels safer for young learners.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Use a weighted or textured object for sensory regulation.	Allow non-verbal students to hold the object to indicate they wish to contribute.






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White Belt: Foundations of Debate

Aspect	Details
Goal	Introduce logical structure, counterarguments, and structured reasoning.
Debate Functions	<p>Expanding an Argument: One reason for this is... / A key point is...</p> <p>Introducing an Opposing View: A common counterargument is... / It has been suggested that...</p>



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Adaptations for Students with Additional Needs	<p>Students with limited language – Pre-teach key topic vocabulary and use sentence scaffolds to extend responses.</p> <p>Neurodivergent students – Provide visual structure for “for and against” sorting to aid logical sequencing.</p> <p>Reluctant speakers – Assign non-verbal roles (e.g., (written summariser) to allow gradual engagement.</p>
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Green Belt: Debate Planning Template

Debate Stage	Guiding Prompts	Student Notes
Topic/Question	What is the issue?	Example: Should the Romans have invaded



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK


Opposing View	What might someone argue against my view?	Some people think that...
Rebuttal	How can I challenge this?	However, I disagree because...





Links to the Tongue Fu Talking™ Practices

Debate Stage	Discipline(s)	Practice(s)
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SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK

Rebuttal	   	   
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Green Belt: Support Scaffolds




For and Against Cards

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
For and Against	Helps students organise arguments into opposing	Provide pre-written statements and ask students to sort them into 'For' or



Because, But, So

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Because, But, So Scaffold	Helps students construct structured responses.	Students build an argument in three parts: Because (explanation). But (opposing



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK

Speaking Frames	Supports students in extending their spoken arguments.	Provide sentence stems to encourage longer, more structured responses.
Example Sentence Frames	<i>I strongly believe that... / On the other hand, some argue that...</i>	Helps students develop confidence in formal speaking.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Offer tiered frames (simple → complex) for differentiation.	Use graphic organisers with space for key phrases.

Debate Ladder	Helps students see how their arguments can be developed in depth.	As students contribute stronger reasoning, move their responses up the ladder.
Example Ladder Steps	<i>1st rung: I agree. → 2nd rung: I agree because... → 3rd rung: I agree because... and my evidence is...</i>	Encourages progressive thinking and deeper reasoning.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Provide physical ladder visuals for students to place their responses.	Use sentence starters to guide argument progression.






**SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE
WATERMARK**





Brown Belt: Structuring Debate & Logic

Aspect	Details
Goal	Build structured arguments, use rebuttals, and engage in formal debates.
Debate Functions	Structuring Arguments: I hold the view that... / My position is supported by... Rebuttal Development: Whilst I acknowledge your points, they do not hold



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK


	Devils Advocate – Challenge – Strengthens rebuttal skills.
Adaptations for Students with Additional Needs	Students with speech & language needs – Model argument structures in small groups before full class discussion. Neurodivergent students – Offer sentence-building activities for constructing rebuttals in writing before verbal practice. Reluctant speakers – Use paired discussion before open debate to increase confidence.





Brown Belt: Debate Planning Template

Debate Stage	Guiding Prompts	Student Notes
Topic/Question	What is the motion we are debating?	Example: Should human colonies be built on Mars?


















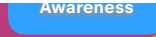




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Counterargument	What is an opposing viewpoint?	Some people argue that...
Rebuttal	Why is this counterargument flawed?	While I understand this view, it fails to consider...





Links to the Tongue Fu Talking™ Practices

Debate Stage	Discipline(s)	Practice(s)
Opening Statement	   	   
	   	   
	Rebuttal	   

 **SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK**

-  THE STANCE
-  THE FLOW
-  THE MIND
-  THE BOND





Brown Belt: Support Scaffolds




Argument Pyramid

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Argument Pyramid	A scaffold for building structured arguments from claim to conclusion.	Students fill out the pyramid, progressing through Claim → Evidence → Counterargument → Rebuttal/Conclusion.



Steal and Improve

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Steal & Improve	Helps students refine and expand on existing arguments.	One student presents an argument → The next student must "steal" it and improve by adding detail or evidence.



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK

Devils Advocate Challenge	Encourages critical thinking by forcing students to consider alternative perspectives.	Assign students opposing roles regardless of their personal opinions.
Example Debate Motion	<i>Should we ban fossil fuels? → For: "They cause climate change." → Against: "Renewable energy isn't always reliable."</i>	Encourages logical flexibility and persuasive thinking.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Provide sentence starters to help structure counterarguments.	Allow extra research time for students who struggle with fast thinking.

Question Generator Dice	A set of dice with question prompts to deepen discussion.	Students roll the dice and ask a question based on the category rolled.
Example Prompts	<i>Why? / How do you know? / What if...? / Can you explain further?</i>	Encourages critical questioning and deeper exploration of topics.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Offer printed prompt cards instead of dice for students who prefer visual support.	Provide simpler question options for students with processing difficulties.






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Black Belt: Mastery of Debate

Aspect	Details
Goal	Develop rhetorical precision, strategic argumentation, and formal competitive debate skills.
	Advanced Argumentation: It is my contention that... / A compelling case can be made for...



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK


	Time Pressure Rebuttal – Builds quick thinking skills in structured debate.
Adaptations for Students with Additional Needs	<p>Neurodivergent students – Provide a structured planning sheet for mapping out argument, counterpoint, and rebuttal before speaking.</p> <p>Students with speech & language needs – Allow for written responses or multimodal participation (e.g., visual argument mapping).</p> <p>Reluctant speakers – Encourage non-verbal contributions (e.g., timekeeping, scoring, or summarising key arguments) before progressing to verbal contributions.</p>





Black Belt: Debate Planning Template

Debate Stage	Guiding Prompts	Student Notes
Topic/Question	What is the motion we are debating?	Example: Should genetic modification be allowed in humans?



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK


Advanced Rebuttal	How do I dismantle this counterargument?	Though initially persuasive, this argument ultimately collapses under scrutiny because...
Strategic Use of Rhetoric	How can I persuade my audience?	I will use analogies, repetition, and powerful concluding statements.





Links to the Tongue Fu Talking™ Practices

Debate Stage	Discipline(s)	Practice(s)
Opening Statement		



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK

Advanced Rebuttal		
Strategic Use of Rhetoric		





Black Belt: Support Scaffolds




Counter-Argument Web

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Counter-Argument Web	Encourages students to consider alternative perspectives before a debate.	Students create a visual web linking main arguments, opposing views, and rebuttals.



Sentence Bank

Support Scaffold	Description	How to Use
Sentence Bank	Supports high-level persuasive language.	Provide sentence stems for advanced debate construction.



SUBSCRIBE TO REMOVE WATERMARK

Timed Pressure Rebuttal	A fast-paced activity where students must respond within strict time limits.	Students have 30 seconds to construct a rebuttal.
Example Usage	<i>Opponent: "We should ban junk food." → Rebuttal: "However, people should have personal choice."</i>	Encourages concise and effective responses.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Allow preparation time before engaging in timed responses.	Use peer coaching for reluctant debaters.

Formal Debate Structure Guide	Provides a clear framework for structured debates.	Introduction → Argument 1 → Counterargument → Rebuttal → Conclusion.
Example Format	<i>Motion: "Should school uniforms be banned?" → Proposition Opening Statement → Opposition Rebuttal → Closing Summary.</i>	Encourages formal debate etiquette and structured discourse.
Adaptations for Additional Needs	Provide sentence prompts for each section.	Allow audio-recorded responses for students who struggle with writing.



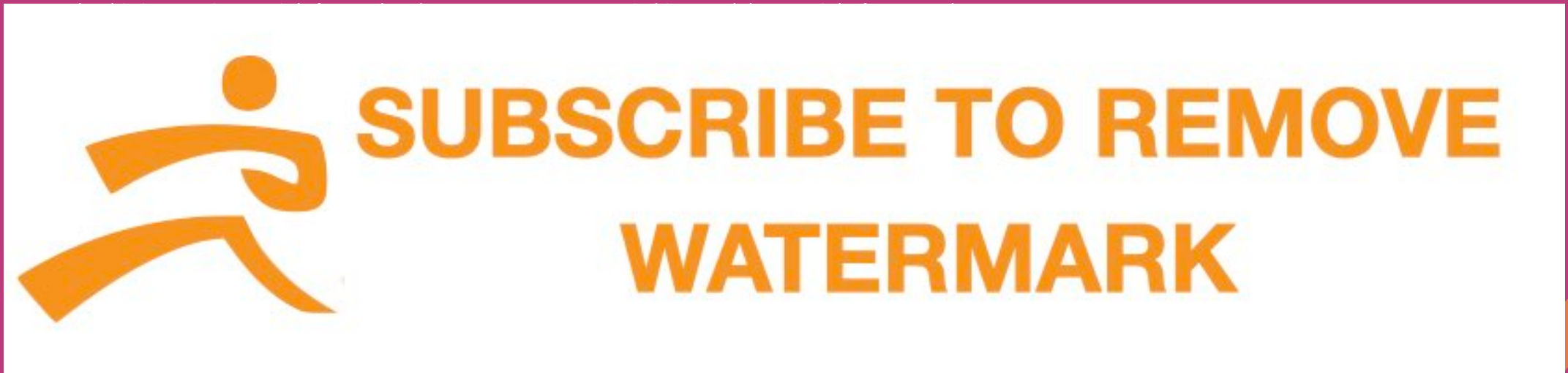
GETTING STARTED WITH DEBATES

To be effective, debates should not be treated as isolated speaking exercises or occasional enrichment tasks. Instead, they should be used regularly and purposefully as part of curriculum learning, helping students to explore content more deeply, reason more clearly, and retain knowledge through structured talk. The Tongue Fu Talking™ Debating Framework is designed to

2. Embed Debating into Curriculum Planning

When planning units, identify points where students could explore a controversial question, evaluate a decision, or weigh evidence. These are natural opportunities for classroom debate that align with your subject objectives. For instance:

- **Paired discussions:** Ideal for early stages or reluctant speakers
- **Small-group debates:** Useful for rehearsing more complex arguments and encouraging every student to contribute
- **Whole-class debates:** Effective for refining ideas and modelling high-level talk



in the city?

Science: Which part of a plant is more important: the roots or the leaves?

Maths: Is counting or adding more useful?

Use support scaffolds such as sentence stems (“I think that... because...”) and debate buddies (paired talk before sharing) to create a safe, structured environment.

content and reinforcing key disciplinary knowledge.

3. Embed Debating into Curriculum Planning

Debating doesn’t always need to be performed in front of the whole class. You can vary the structure based on your students’ confidence and the stage of the framework:

Use the planning templates provided at each belt level to walk through the process together. These visual and verbal guides support students to move from surface-level opinion to structured, evidence-based argument.



5. Revisit and Reuse

Debate is most effective when it becomes a regular feature of classroom life, not a special occasion. Revisit key debate formats and functions throughout the term using different topics and subjects. This repetition builds fluency, confidence and cognitive control.

By embedding debates within everyday teaching and aligning them with curriculum content, teachers can transform classroom talk into a powerful learning strategy. Rather than being reserved for confident speakers or special occasions, debate becomes a routine part of how students explore ideas, challenge assumptions, and make meaning.



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debating helps reluctant speakers and neurodivergent students participate with increasing confidence and independence.

