



## The Marketplace of Ideas

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### Overview

This lesson is designed for a 50-minute period and investigates the value of free speech and the marketplace of ideas in a democratic society. Students will be able to explain why free speech is important to self-governance in a democratic society while reflecting on quotations from well-known Supreme Court justices. Engaging in a 4-corners activity will allow students to discuss important ideas about free speech and the marketplace of ideas. By the end of the lesson, students will consider the responsibilities of participants in the marketplace of ideas. This will provide a foundation for future lessons that focus on the value of rhetorical listening.



## Essential Questions

- What is the purpose of rhetoric?
- What's the value of rhetoric for civil discourse?
- How can rhetoric be a bridge that connects people with diverse viewpoints?

## Materials

- Journal
- National Constitution Center video: "[The Role of Free Speech in Democracy](#)"
- 4 quotations for the 4-corners activity

## Learning Objectives

- Explain why free speech is important in a society that is governed by democratic ideals
- Connect the value of free speech to the value of the marketplace of ideas
- Investigate one's responsibility when engaging in the marketplace of ideas

## Warm-Up

Show students [this short video clip](#) of Justice Elena Kagan by the National Constitution Center. Then, post the journal prompt on the board and ask students to respond in their journals.

### Journal prompt:

- What does Justice Elena Kagan believe about free speech in a democratic society? Do you agree or disagree with her? Explain.
- In this video clip, Justice Kagan says that "thought, speech, and reflection on ideas" can help in governing a democratic society. What do you think she means by this?

### DEBRIEF

Have students talk with a partner about their journal entry. Then, come back together as a whole class and ask a few students to share with the group.

### SAY

Last class period, we participated in a simulation of Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor. Thinking back on that for a moment, what role did free speech play in your conversations? How would your conversations have been different if your speech was restricted?

Note: You might bring up the fact that the late arrivals in the last lesson have restricted speech because they were told to express a specific opinion. Debriefing about this aspect could help students explore the idea of free speech more thoroughly.

## Explore

Connect Justice Kagan's ideas about the role of free speech in effectively governing a democratic society to the metaphor of the marketplace of ideas by having students engage in the following activity.

### STEP 1

Select 4 key quotations that speak to an aspect of free speech and marketplace of ideas.

### STEP 2

Assign each quotation to one of the 4 corners of the classroom. Several quotations you might consider include the following:

- "The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out."  
—Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1919
- "Debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials." —Justice William Brennan, 1964
- "The classroom is peculiarly the 'marketplace of ideas.' The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth 'out of a multitude of tongues, (rather) than through any kind of authoritative selection.'" —Justice Abe Fortas, 1969
- "Every idea is an incitement. It offers itself for belief and if believed it is acted on unless some other belief outweighs it or some failure of energy stifles the movement at its birth."  
—Justice Hugo Black, 1969

### STEP 3

Give students a chance to read the quotations and then ask them to choose the quotation they find the most interesting or compelling by standing in the corner of their chosen quotation.

### STEP 4

Once all students have chosen a quotation, have them talk with other people in their corner about why they chose that quotation and what they found interesting or compelling.

### DISCUSS

Using the discussion prompts below, keep students in their chosen corners and facilitate a whole-class discussion about the 4-corners activity.

- What is similar and different about these quotations?

- What does your chosen quotation say about the value of free speech or the marketplace of ideas?
- If each of these quotations were in our class's "marketplace of ideas," which is the most valuable? Which is the least?
- How did we decide as a class that these were the most valuable and least valuable ideas? Is this how the marketplace of ideas works outside of our classroom?

Use this discussion to garner student opinions about the quotations and their growing understanding of the marketplace of ideas. Students should begin thinking about how this applies to the reality of their everyday lives and the role that civil conversation plays.

## Reflect and Connect

### STEP 1

Pose the following question to students. Have them write in their journals or discuss with a partner.

How do you know if an idea is valuable and worth investing in?

### STEP 2

After several minutes, ask students to share responses. Write students' thoughts on the board or a piece of chart paper. Some suggestions might include the following: facts are better than opinions; a person's experience gives credibility; ideas from leaders are more credible; scholarship is more valuable than the daily news, etc.

### STEP 3

Ask students to recall this quotation from Francis Bacon:

"The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will."

—FRANCIS BACON

### STEP 4

Prompt students to connect Bacon's words to the marketplace of ideas by reminding students that the marketplace of ideas always provides the opportunity for ideas to flourish, whether they are good or bad.

### STEP 5

Ask students this question: Thinking about Bacon's words, what is the responsibility of the person "selling" ideas and the person "consuming" ideas?

## Closing the Lesson

Close out the lesson by revisiting the connection between free speech and the marketplace of ideas. If there is time, give students a little teaser of the next lesson by asking them what role listening plays in the success or failure of ideas in the marketplace.

## Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D:** Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6:** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3:** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6:** Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.