



Agree to Disagree

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm: What do you think the phrase means “Agree to disagree”? In what types of situations or conversations have you heard the phrase?

Discuss: The phrase, “agree to disagree” often seems to be said when a discussion that you might be having with someone seems to be going badly. You can’t seem to change the other person’s mind, and you decide to drop the subject. Saying “Well, I guess we’ll have to agree to disagree.” seems to bring the conversation to a conclusion. And then, you just have to accept that each person has their own way of thinking about the subject and that there is no middle ground for agreement.

Dive in! But, what if the whole idea of a conversation was not to just simply agree but to actually try to understand each other? What if, instead of using the phrase at the end of the conversation to wrap it up, we tried to use it at the beginning? What if instead of trying to change each other’s mind about our unique positions, we decided to just talk about this difficult subject AND accept that the end of the conversation will be the same as the beginning with respect to our individual points of view. You might say, “well, what’s the point of having the conversation in the first place then?” Not all conversations are about convincing others that our point of view is the correct one. There are several other reasons for having a conversation where changing someone’s mind is not the goal...

1. Disagreement is healthy. In order for our ideas to be well thought out, we need to be challenged. A disagreement is an opportunity to sharpen our position and improve our conversation skills.
2. When we set aside our need to win the argument, we open up the possibility of learning something new. If we know that our position will be respected, we may feel less defensive and more open to new ideas.
3. When entering into conversations for the sake of understanding rather than changing minds, the relationship between you and the other person can be strengthened.



High School

Statements like, “You make a good point...” “I agree with you that...”, “That’s something I think we both can agree upon.” can show respect and collaboration.

Activity: The more we practice these types of conversations that BEGIN with “agreeing to disagree” the better we’ll become and understanding others. In the beginning, having some phrases that help move the conversation along can be useful. Using Conversation Connectors can help us have more robust, respectful conversations. Find a partner and choose a topic that you both have a different opinion on such as “best pizza topping” or “my pet is the world’s best!”, “the best movie ever is...”, “best sports team is...” Once you have the topic, remind yourself that you are NOT trying to convince your partner of your positions. You are simply trying to explain your side of the argument AND understand your partner’s viewpoint.

When I agree and want to explain why...	When I agree and want to add on...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I agree with your answer, because...• I think our answer is right, because...• I got the same answer as you, because...• I agree with you because...• I agree with... and I’d like to add...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That’s a good point and I’d like to add...• I think you’re right, and I also think...• That’s a great idea, and don’t you think...• I agree with... when he/she said... and I also want to add...
When I disagree and want to explain why...	When I want to understand more...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I respectfully disagree with... and I think...• I disagree with your idea of... and I think...• I disagree with your reasoning and I think...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What made you think that?• How did you get that answer?• Why is it important?• What’s your evidence?



High School

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I know where you're coming from and I have a different idea/opinion...	
When I want more clarification...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you mean by...?• Can you repeat that please?• How do you know?• So you're saying...?• Can you say more about...?	

Reflect: How did the conversation go? How did you feel about sharing your thoughts? Did you think that your partner made some reasonable points? Did it make you want to consider your partner's side more that you might have if you were trying to "win" the argument? How might this perspective change how you think about conversations where there are different perspectives? How might you benefit from this perspective?

Extend and Enrich: One way to confirm that you do understand the other person's perspective is to try to change sides in the argument and try to articulate the other perspective. Have students switch sides and then continue on the discussion. How did it feel? Were they able to argue the other side effectively? To do this extension activity effectively, students will have to listen carefully to their partner and ask clarifying questions to really be able to argue the other side well.

For Further Study

Katy Perry: Agree to Disagree (track 23 on Fingerprints)

Julia Dhar: How to disagree productively and find common ground TED@BCG Toronto

https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_dhar_how_to_disagree_productively_and_find_common_ground



High School

Professional Development

Thinking about the perspectives of your students, how often do you encourage them to share their ideas and opinions? Have you ever changed your mind based on hearing their perspectives? What was the deciding factor for you?