



ON YOUR SOAPBOX

Level: Advanced (C1)

Age: Teenagers / Adults

Time: 45 minutes

Language summary: Expressions related to discussion and debate, language of comparison, language of speculation

Image work: Looking at an image from different perspectives; using an image as a stimulus for discussion

PROCEDURE:

1 Ask the students to discuss this question in pairs and then go through the possible responses as a class.

on your soapbox = expressing strong opinions, often in an annoying way (a soapbox was originally a box that someone would stand on to make a speech in public)

2 having a chat = talking informally to friends, often about lighter topics (can be used more seriously: 'I need to have a chat with him' generally means there is an issue to discuss)

having a conversation = exchanging thoughts and feelings with others

having a debate = discussing an issue from different perspectives and expressing various viewpoints

having an argument = having a discussion in which disagreement is strongly expressed, sometimes angrily

Emphasize that the meaning of all these expressions is very similar and they are often used interchangeably. It is a matter of opinion when a debate becomes an argument.

3 coming to blows = to have a very serious disagreement, sometimes resulting in physical violence

at each other's throats = when two people argue in a very angry manner with each other

gloves coming off = when people argue in a serious manner (origin: from boxing)

not seeing eye to eye = to disagree with another person's point of view

arguing for the sake of arguing = when someone starts an argument deliberately, regardless of the topic

All the expressions are about disagreement rather

than finding ways to understand each other.

4 Anticipate that students will recognize this image and engage their knowledge on the topic. Politicians and Members of Parliament in the UK work in the Houses of Parliament. More information can be found at www.parliament.uk. Invite students to compare the UK model with that in their own country.

5 Accept a variety of responses here. Some would say that the idea of consensus is another way of reaching agreement, which means calm discussion until everyone has reached agreement (and compromise).

6 Accept a variety of responses here. Some possible ideas are: a) becoming better listeners; b) letting people finish what they have to say; c) looking for points of similarity and learning to compromise; d) speaking to others with respect. Hopefully students will bring up the idea of choosing your battles wisely, i.e. arguments might be inevitable but perhaps are worth avoiding over minor issues. Spend some time looking at issues students feel are worth fighting for as this is a rich source of discussion.

7 Allow plenty of time for this activity. You may need to help students unpick the meaning, as some of the quotations are quite dense. You could assign one quote to each group or assign them all to all groups depending on the size of your group and length of your lesson. In brief, the central messages are:

- The point of debating is not agreement but exploring ideas.
- When people feel passionately about something, they are more likely to sound angry.
- Personal belief and internal strength are more important than physical size or ability.
- Sometimes saying nothing is as powerful as speaking.
- Beliefs need to be presented in a way that makes sense to people.



ON YOUR SOAPBOX

- 1 With a partner discuss the meaning of the expression *on your soap box*. Do you have a similar expression in your language? When do you use it?
- 2 What do you think are the similarities/differences between these activities? What particular skills does debating require?
 - having a chat
 - having a conversation
 - having a debate
 - having an argument
- 3 Do you know what these expressions connected to debate and argument mean? What do they all have in common?
 - *coming to blows*
 - *at each other's throats*
 - *gloves coming off*
 - *not seeing eye to eye*
 - *arguing for the sake of arguing*
- 4 Look at the picture and describe it to your partner. Where have you seen this image before? Who works there and what do they do? What does the building where the government of your country meets look like?
- 5 Politicians often argue and debate with each other and believe that argument is healthy. What do you think? Are there other ways of resolving problems?
- 6 In groups of three, discuss how you can help see the other person's point of view when you are in a discussion or debate. How can you avoid arguments? What things do you think are worth fighting for?
- 7 Look at the following quotations about debate and discussion. In the same groups decide which you agree or disagree with and why. Be ready to share your ideas with the rest of the class.
 - *It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it. (Joubert)*
 - *When a heart is on fire, sparks always fly out of the mouth. (Chinese Proverb)*
 - *It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog. (Mark Twain)*
 - *Silence is a true friend who never betrays. (Confucius)*
 - *Reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form. (Karl Marx)*