



## Enrichment Activity – Secondary Schools Component

### **Argument Traps**

Teacher's Sheet

In the course of this activity, voters in training must create a scene involving a questionable argument and have the class guess how these arguments are traps.

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#### **Link with the Québec Education Program**

Social Sciences area – To construct his/her representation of space, time and society

#### **Objectives**

- ✓ Understanding how argumentation works
- ✓ Recognizing a sound argument

#### **Length**

60 minutes

#### **Material required**

- ✓ Copies of the Voters in Training "Argument Traps" activity sheet
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#### **Icebreaker activity**

Explain to students that an election campaign is a period in which parties, candidates, family members and friends may try to convince us of the merits of their ideas. Some are very good at arguing and convincing!

Ask students whether they have heard people debating the current election campaign.

## A bit of theory

Participating in the electoral exercise necessarily means comparing your opinions with those of others. Debates should take place in an atmosphere of openness and respect, and must be based on solid arguments, in other words arguments that are able to defend the theory or idea put forth.

### How can we judge an argument's worth?

To recognize a valid argument, we can rely on the criteria of relevance and credibility. An argument is relevant when the points presented are closely related to the idea being upheld. An argument is credible when the points presented deserve our trust because they are consistent with our knowledge.

### Argument traps

Some arguments may seem convincing, but only appear that way. Here is a table of some traps to avoid in order to defend an opinion properly.

Argument Traps	Definition	Examples
Appeal to emotions	Seeking to arouse emotions in order to convince: pity, fear, disgust, hate, etc.	"This government is responsible for small children suffering terribly, because it hasn't fixed the problems with our transportation system."  "Supporting the X Party will lead to a war between urban areas, which will slow down the development of our cities."
Personal attack	Attacking your opponent rather than their arguments	"That candidate is wrong because she doesn't dress well and is not very feminine."  "That mayor is too old to offer an interesting view of sustainable development."
Appeal to authority	Using an authority figure to defend an argument when that person is not an expert on the matter	"The mayor says we will achieve the objectives of the Kyoto Protocol, so it's true."  "My father says that the X Party is made up of dishonest people, so it's true."
False dilemma	Presenting only two possibilities when several others exist	"Vote for me and we will prosper; vote for my opponent and we'll be ruined."  "What is your priority: education or health?"



## **Suggested steps**

1. Referring to the information presented in "A Bit of Theory," explain to the students that forming a solid opinion is the way to avoid argument traps.
2. Divide the class into teams of two or three. Distribute an "Argument Traps" activity sheet to each team.
3. Give each team a role-play scenario from the list given in appendix. Note that you can also invent other scenarios, for instance relating to life at your school.
4. Ask each team to use the scenario it has received as inspiration to make up a short scene incorporating the required argument trap.
5. Ask each team in turn to present its scene in front of the class. Will the other students be able to find the argument trap in each one?

## APPENDIX – List of Role-play Scenarios to Distribute to Students

### Scenario I

While going to the movies with your best friend, you want to convince him/her that it's all right to pay for just one movie and then see a second one by sneaking unseen into the other movie theatre.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: Personal attack

### Scenario II

You want to convince your mother to buy you expensive running shoes that everyone else has, but she doesn't want to.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: Appeal to emotions

### Scenario III

The student council wants to convince the principal to change the cafeteria menu.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: Appeal to authority

### Scenario IV

The Prime Minister wants to convince the population to support a war s/he is about to launch.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: Appeal to emotions

### Scenario V

Your father tries to convince you to tidy up your room.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: Appeal to authority



# Voters in training

## **Scenario VI**

The candidate from the X Party wants to convince a group of people to vote for him.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: False dilemma

## **Scenario VII**

You want to convince your family that you should make compost at home to reduce waste and help the environment.

ARGUMENT PITFALL TO INCORPORATE: False dilemma

## Enrichment Activity – Secondary Schools Component

### Argument Traps

Voters in Training Sheet

Now that you have learned that arguments may contain traps, it's time for you to act! As a team, act out the argument trap presented in your role-play scenario. Fill in the table below to help guide your creative work.

**Argument trap to act out:**

**Title of the scene:**

**Actors:**

**Your scene:**

### Broaden your horizons

The next time you hear someone around you discussing a party, a candidate or an issue tied to the ongoing election campaign, pay attention to the arguments presented and be aware! Are they argument traps?