

# THE FRANKLIN FORUM



DEMOCRACY DEMANDS  
DISCUSSION, DISCOURSE  
AND DEBATE

## Franklin Forum Overview:

The Franklin Forum is based on a simple premise, one clearly understood by our founding fathers - *Democracy Demands Discussion, Discourse, and Debate.*

The Franklin Forum is this principle of democracy in practice. It places people in the arena of public debate; allowing them to test their opinions, hear opposing views, and debate current issues, all in a setting with a free and open exchange of ideas. The Forum teaches the ability to disagree and still be agreeable even in a passionate exchange of views.

Applied to the high school environment, the Forum obliges students to discuss issues and defend their opinions amongst their peers and adults; it forces them to think more seriously and analytically about an issue and its ramifications. Rather than depending on knee-jerk reactions or a crowd mentality, these students will begin to form their own political philosophy as well as an understanding of the fundamental principles of government and society. They will discover that their opinions matter. Subsequently, they will discover that it is important they be able to defend those opinions. This will lead to better students and better citizens.

A representative democracy needs citizens who discuss and evaluate issues and vote with an educated opinion. Unfortunately the climate of political discussion today is prohibitive, often degenerating into name calling. Discourse has become coarse. We often only watch news programs, listen to radio stations, and read newspapers that agree with our political bias. Many formulate opinions based on a "team" mentality, often not listening to the reasoning of the opposing view but instead accusing those who hold it of bad intentions.

It seems that we are losing the ability to discuss difficult, controversial, or even simple issues without losing our temper. The Franklin Forum changes that dynamic. In it one can challenge any viewpoint and is equally challenged in their own. The best aspect of the Forum is that it almost always ends with the participants more friendly when they walk out, than when they came in.

The Franklin Forum begins a process of participation in a democratic society at the most basic level - by encouraging involvement in the public discourse. It gets people to think about issues and public policy. It make better citizens who can communicate their views and who are more prepared to vote.

## The Franklin Forum

### Mission:

Democracy Demands Discussion, Discourse, and Debate.

To engage students in the arena of public debate and begin a process of participation in a democratic society. To show that one needs to hear other opinions and be familiar with other viewpoints. To show that all views can be brought up, and that all views are open for scrutiny, evaluation and assessment. To put the principles of democracy in practice and teach the ability to disagree while still being agreeable. To cultivate good citizens who reflect upon, discuss, and evaluate issues and public policy, and who cast a knowledgeable vote.

### Goals:

- To encourage analytical thought;
- To encourage discourse and communication;
- To encourage participation in the political process;
- To encourage the development of a political philosophy; and
- To encourage a sense of self in a political society.

### Benefits of The Forum:

Exposes students to topical, difficult, and philosophical issues.

Exposes students to various views and their ramifications.

Demonstrates that every viewpoint is valid to be raised in a free society.

Demonstrates that every opinion can be scrutinized and assessed.

Demonstrates that others can have an opposing opinion and still be our friend.

Encourages students to seriously think about and evaluate public policy.

Allows students to test their ideas and views in the arena of debate.

Allows students to formulate their own opinion and political philosophy.

Confirms that their opinion is important and should be well thought out.

Confirms that you can accept losing the argument in a free society.

Starts a process of participation in our democratic system.

Cultivates citizens who reflect upon government and societal issues.

Cultivates citizens who are engaged in and add to the public discourse.

Cultivates citizens who are more prepared when casting their vote.

Provides a link between the community, business and the school.

### How the Franklin Forum Works:

The Forum works by utilizing a basic fact of human nature - we all like to give our opinion, and we feel empowered when our opinion is taken seriously. The Forum does this quite simply by placing students in the arena of public debate. The Forum creates a setting for a free and open exchange of ideas and views in which various members of the community are invited to participate. This introduces diverse opinions and viewpoints from many walks of life.

At the start a moderator introduces a topic by reading a brief background and presenting all sides of the issue with relevant facts. Participants are then asked to give their opinion, agreeing or disagreeing with the other participants. As the conversation moves along the moderator may introduce quotes or viewpoints that bring a new direction to the discussion. Topics concern current political, constitutional, or societally issues. Opinions are discussed, debated, and scrutinized, all governed by a code of debate to insure equality.

The Franklin Forum is unique in that it creates an equality among the participants. Everyone is equal in the room, regardless of age, position, or status - all opinions are equal. There are no titles used so no one has an advantage, everyone is called by their first name. Each person must stand on the merits of their opinion and how that opinion is viewed, explained and defended.

This is not a formal debate, you can re-evaluate, change your mind or stick to your opinion. There are no winners or losers. This is not a classroom. Often times a student will say what he thinks the teacher wants to hear, what will get her a good grade, or he will mirror a particular political agenda that the teacher is partial too or espousing. There are no such influences in the Forum. This is discussion and discourse in a democratic society.

By putting students in the arena of public debate, they quickly learn that their opinions matter, that their views are taken seriously. This is empowering and helps develop confidence, analytical thought, and the ability to re-examine and change one's view. The Franklin Forum is the principle of democracy in practice. There is no political agenda in the Forum, except to teach the ability to disagree and still be friends.

### The Franklin Forum Set Up:

The forum utilizes a wide U shaped seating arrangement in which students sit behind the table and a moderator stands in front, directing the discussion. Various members of the community, as well as teachers are invited to participate. The forum is kept to a maximum of 20 - 25 people to allow a vibrant conversation.

The Franklin Forum is governed by Promethean Debate, which has the following code:

I. No Titles:

All participants are equal.

II. No Preferences:

All opinions are equal.

III. No Restraints:

All discussions are free and open.

IV. No Repercussions:

All conversations are free of personal attack.

V. No Victories:

All debate seeks truth.

## Franklin Forum

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