

# Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) Group Activity

Below is a **comprehensive, classroom-ready group activity** for a **Structured Academic Controversy (SAC)**—fully scaffolded, with procedures, prompts, timing, and assessment.

**Focus:** Research a historical dilemma, argue both sides, and reach a reasoned consensus.

**Works For:** Debates, revolutions, decisions, policies, court cases, conquests, constitutional issues, foreign policy, and scientific controversies.

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## I. Purpose of the SAC

The Structured Academic Controversy is designed to help students:

- Examine multiple perspectives on a complex historical issue
  - Distinguish evidence from opinion
  - Practice respectful disagreement
  - Understand nuance beyond “pro/con”
  - Develop listening and collaborative discussion skills
  - Learn that informed people can interpret evidence differently
  - Aim for **consensus**, not victory
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## II. Possible Historical Dilemmas for This SAC Format

You can plug in **any** dilemma, but here are ready-to-use prompts:

- **Should the U.S. have dropped the atomic bomb on Japan?**
- **Should Rome have expanded into Britain?**
- **Was the American Revolution justified?**
- **Should the Spanish have colonized the Americas?**
- **Was the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror necessary?**
- **Should the United States have entered World War I?**
- **Was the Mongol conquest beneficial or harmful to world history?**
- **Should the British have industrialized so rapidly?**
- **Was Athenian democracy truly democratic?**

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## III. Group Setup

**Group Size:** 4 students (ideal)

- **Pair A** argues **YES/Pro**
- **Pair B** argues **NO/Con**

If groups of 3: one student rotates roles.

If groups of 5: one student is evidence moderator.

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## IV. Materials Needed

- Brief historical background reading (teacher-supplied)
  - Evidence packets: excerpts, maps, charts, primary-source quotes
  - Note-taking sheet for each role
  - Consensus worksheet
  - Timer
  - Optional: sentence starters sheet for academic discussion
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## V. Full SAC Procedure (60–90 minutes)

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### Step 1 — Background + Evidence Prep (10–15 min)

Students read the provided packet and highlight:

- Evidence supporting **Side A**
- Evidence supporting **Side B**
- Possible counterarguments
- Unanswered questions or uncertainties

Prompt students to **annotate ambiguities**—SAC thrives on nuance.

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## Step 2 — Preparation in Pairs (10 minutes)

Pairs craft a **short, evidence-based argument** for their assigned side.

They prepare:

- A claim (1–2 sentences)
  - 3–5 pieces of evidence
  - Anticipated counterpoints
  - A concluding statement
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## Step 3 — Round 1: Pair A Presents (6 minutes)

Pair A has **3 minutes** to present.

Pair B has **3 minutes** to ask clarifying questions only (no arguing back).

**Sentence starters:**

- “Can you explain why you interpret this source that way?”
  - “What role did context play in your argument?”
  - “How do you account for \_\_\_ whether or not it supports your position?”
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## Step 4 — Round 2: Pair B Presents (6 minutes)

Pair B has **3 minutes** to present.

Pair A has **3 minutes** to ask clarifying questions only.

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## Step 5 — Debate: Evidence Exchange (6–10 minutes)

Now both sides can respectfully challenge ideas.

Rules:

- Critique ideas, not people
- Use evidence, not emotions
- Reference specific document numbers/sources
- Allow equal speaking time

**Goal:** Understand each side, not win.

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## Step 6 — Switch Sides (10 minutes)

Pairs switch positions.

Students must now argue **the opposite view**.

This forces:

- Perspective-taking
- Appreciation of complexity
- Better historical interpretation skills
- Recognition of bias and assumptions

Students prepare a **NEW claim + evidence list**.

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## Step 7 — Round 3: Consensus Conversation (10–15 minutes)

Students return to neutral positions.

They use a **Consensus Worksheet** to answer:

- What points did both sides agree on?
- What are the strongest arguments on each side?
- Where is the evidence inconclusive or contradictory?
- What is our group's overall consensus?
- If consensus isn't possible, what is the closest "nuanced" agreement?

**Consensus can take forms like:**

- "Side A is stronger overall because..."
  - "Both positions have valid points, but the best interpretation is..."
  - "We disagree, but the most important factors are..."
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## Step 8 — Whole-Class Debrief (10 minutes)

Teacher leads a conversation:

- What made this issue complex?
- Did switching sides change your thinking?

- How did evidence shape your view?
  - What strategies helped reach consensus?
  - How might historians disagree about the same event?
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## VI. Student Products

Choose 1–3 outputs:

### 1. Written Reflection

Prompt:

*Explain how your perspective changed through the SAC process. Which pieces of evidence were most influential and why?*

### 2. Consensus Statement

The group submits a 1-paragraph consensus summary.

### 3. Argument Reconstruction

Individual students write the **best possible argument for the OTHER side.**

### 4. Historical Claim + Counterclaim Paragraphs

Write a CER (Claim-Evidence-Reasoning) paragraph for each side.

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## VII. Assessment Options

### Participation Rubric

- Listens actively
- Uses evidence
- Respects others' ideas
- Contributes evenly
- Works toward consensus

### Argument Rubric

- Clear claim

- Specific and relevant evidence
  - Integration of sources
  - Historical reasoning
  - Acknowledges counterarguments
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## VIII. Extensions

- **Silent SAC:** Same structure, but written in rotating “pass-the-paper” or Google Docs mode.
- **Gallery Walk SAC:** Each group posts their arguments and consensus.
- **Podcast SAC:** Students record side-switch arguments as episodes.
- **Role-Based SAC:** Students argue from the perspective of historical figures (e.g., Loyalist vs. Patriot, Tokugawa official vs. European merchant, etc.).