

The Art of Argument

This is a complete classroom podcast project plan for “**The Art of Argument**” — a civic literacy and rhetoric-focused podcast that merges debate, public speaking, and media analysis. It’s written in a clean, academic, and print-ready format for classroom or digital use.

Focus: Debate, Rhetoric, and Civic Literacy

Project Type: Speech and Debate Analysis Podcast

Length: 4–5 class periods

Product: 8–10 minute group podcast episode

Mode: Small group (3–5 students)

Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Analyze arguments from historical speeches, editorials, and court cases using rhetorical frameworks.
2. Evaluate how effective reasoning, evidence, and delivery shape public opinion and policy.
3. Apply classical rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) and modern argumentation techniques to their own writing and speaking.
4. Produce a podcast that models civic discussion and persuasive communication grounded in research and evidence.

Standards Alignment (CCSS):

- RI.9-10.8 – Evaluate reasoning and evidence in seminal U.S. texts.
 - SL.9-10.3 – Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of rhetoric.
 - W.9-10.1 – Write arguments to support claims with valid reasoning and evidence.
 - SL.9-10.1 – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.
 - RH.9-10.9 – Compare treatments of the same topic across sources.
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Project Overview

The Art of Argument bridges the worlds of debate, rhetoric, and civic discourse. Students analyze **how persuasive language influences change**—from courtroom arguments and political speeches to op-eds and public debates.

Each group selects a **debate-worthy issue** (historical or contemporary) and examines how it has been argued by key figures, movements, or institutions. They then script and record a podcast episode that:

1. Analyzes examples of powerful rhetoric and reasoning, and
2. Presents an original, student-crafted debate or speech segment applying those same principles.

The result is a dynamic blend of analysis, performance, and civic engagement.

Session Breakdown

Session 1 – Understanding Argument and Choosing a Focus

Goal: Explore classical and modern argument structures; select a central issue or text.

Activities:

- Review Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals: **ethos** (credibility), **pathos** (emotion), and **logos** (logic).
 - Introduce Toulmin’s model of argument (claim, evidence, warrant, counterclaim).
 - Examine examples of enduring rhetoric:
 - *Abraham Lincoln* – “*Gettysburg Address*” (1863)
 - *Sojourner Truth* – “*Ain’t I a Woman?*” (1851)
 - *Frederick Douglass* – “*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*” (1852)
 - *Susan B. Anthony* – “*Women’s Right to Vote*” (1873)
 - *Martin Luther King Jr.* – “*I Have a Dream*” (1963)
 - *Ruth Bader Ginsburg* – *Oral Argument in United States v. Virginia* (1996)
 - *Editorials or op-eds* from current issues (education, environment, equality, technology)
 - Each group selects one **central issue** (e.g., free speech, equality, voting rights, climate action) and compiles sources from historical and contemporary contexts.
 - Begin filling out an **Argument Analysis Organizer** that identifies:
 - Speaker/author and purpose
 - Audience and context
 - Appeals (ethos, pathos, logos)
 - Key rhetorical devices (parallelism, repetition, analogy, rhetorical question)
 - Strengths and weaknesses of reasoning
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Session 2 – Analyzing and Planning the Episode

Goal: Compare historical and modern arguments; develop the group’s own stance.

Activities:

- Analyze the rhetorical effectiveness of chosen sources.
- Discuss guiding questions:
 - What made this argument persuasive or influential in its time?
 - How does language shape power, justice, or identity?
 - What modern issue echoes this debate today?
 - How can students frame their own argument on the topic?
- Organize the episode into two halves:
 1. **Analysis Segment** – Break down 1–2 historic or modern examples of powerful argumentation.
 2. **Performance Segment** – Present original, student-written speeches or debates applying similar rhetorical strategies.
- Draft a **Podcast Script Outline**:
 1. **Introduction (1 minute)**: Introduce the topic and why it matters.
 2. **Historical or Contemporary Case Analysis (3–4 minutes)**: Examine rhetorical examples.
 3. **Student Debate/Speech Segment (3–4 minutes)**: Present opposing sides or persuasive arguments.
 4. **Reflection and Conclusion (1–2 minutes)**: Summarize takeaways about effective argumentation and civic dialogue.

Example Excerpt:

Host: “Welcome to *The Art of Argument*, where we uncover how powerful words move nations—and people. Today, we’re revisiting Frederick Douglass’s call for justice and asking: what makes a moral argument persuasive?”

Speaker 2: “Douglass’s use of ethos established his credibility as both a witness to slavery and a moral philosopher. He invoked pathos through vivid imagery—forcing listeners to confront hypocrisy.”

Speaker 3: “That same emotional appeal echoes in modern movements for racial justice. So today, we’ll debate how moral urgency balances with logical policy reform.”

Session 3 – Recording and Production

Goal: Record, edit, and finalize a professional, structured episode.

Activities:

- Record using classroom devices or software such as Soundtrap, Audacity, or GarageBand.
- Maintain clear, formal tone while allowing conversational flow.
- Integrate short clips or readings from historical texts (read aloud by students).
- Include a mini debate, mock trial, or student-written persuasive speech using rhetorical appeals.

- Optional: add background music, applause sounds, or transitions for emphasis.
- Recommended episode length: 8–10 minutes total.

Suggested Opening Line:

“Welcome to *The Art of Argument*, where words meet reason and rhetoric meets responsibility.”

Session 4 – Reflection and Peer Listening

Goal: Evaluate the craft of argument and effective civic discourse.

Activities:

- Share podcasts in a “Voices of Persuasion” listening session.
 - Peers complete a **Rhetoric Reflection Sheet** evaluating:
 - Which appeals were strongest and why?
 - How did the episode model constructive debate?
 - What rhetorical techniques could you apply in your own writing or speaking?
 - Teacher leads closing discussion on the importance of reasoned argument in a democratic society.
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Group Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Host/Moderator	Introduces issue, guides discussion, ensures balance and clarity
Historian	Provides context for historical texts and key rhetorical examples
Analyst	Dissects rhetoric and identifies appeals and techniques
Debater/Speaker	Delivers or performs student-crafted arguments
Producer/Editor	Manages recording, pacing, and sound quality

Suggested Source Materials

Historical Texts

- Abraham Lincoln – “Gettysburg Address” (1863)
- Frederick Douglass – “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852)
- Sojourner Truth – “Ain’t I a Woman?” (1851)
- Susan B. Anthony – “Women’s Right to Vote” (1873)
- Martin Luther King Jr. – “I Have a Dream” (1963)
- Malcolm X – “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)

- John F. Kennedy – “Inaugural Address” (1961)
- Barbara Jordan – “1976 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address”

Modern Sources

- Greta Thunberg – “Our House Is on Fire” (2019)
- Op-eds from *The New York Times* or *The Atlantic*
- Supreme Court arguments and opinions (Brown v. Board of Education, Obergefell v. Hodges)
- Student-selected TED Talks or campaign speeches

Assessment Rubric (20 points)

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
Rhetorical Analysis	Insightful, detailed evaluation of arguments and appeals	Clear understanding of rhetorical strategies	Partial or basic analysis	Minimal or inaccurate analysis
Application and Debate	Strong original argument using classical and modern techniques	Clear and persuasive argument	Some clarity or logic gaps	Unfocused or unsupported claims
Evidence and Context	Uses multiple credible sources and historical examples	Some relevant evidence used effectively	Limited sourcing or context	Weak or missing evidence
Collaboration and Delivery	Cohesive, balanced discussion and polished recording	Mostly clear and well-paced	Uneven participation	Disorganized or unclear
Civic Literacy and Insight	Thoughtful engagement with civic and ethical issues	Clear understanding of real-world implications	Some insight but limited depth	Superficial or unclear purpose

Extension Options

1. **Public Debate Series:** Record follow-up “debate round” episodes on current policy issues using structured argument formats.
2. **Speechwriting Workshop:** Turn each student’s segment into a full persuasive speech, annotated for rhetorical appeals.
3. **Mock Courtroom Episode:** Simulate a Supreme Court oral argument, citing constitutional and rhetorical evidence.

4. **Media Analysis Crossover:** Compare political rhetoric to modern influencer or advertising strategies in a special “Power of Persuasion” episode.