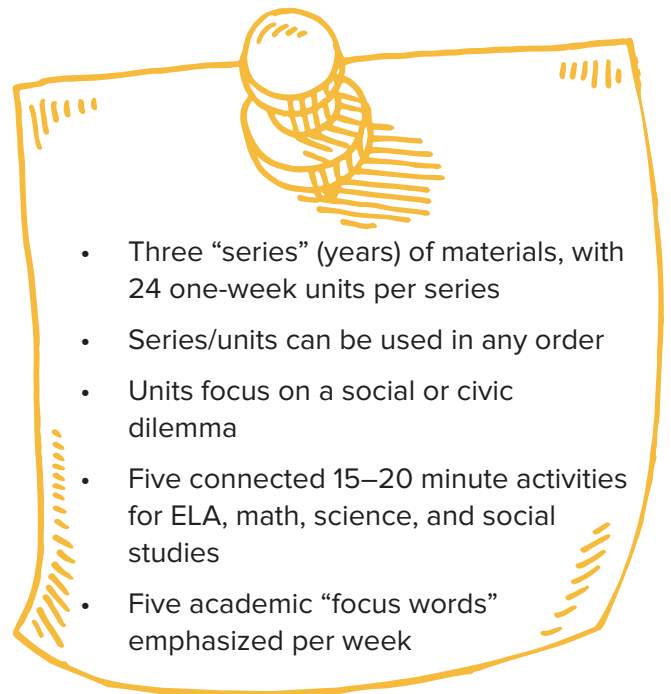




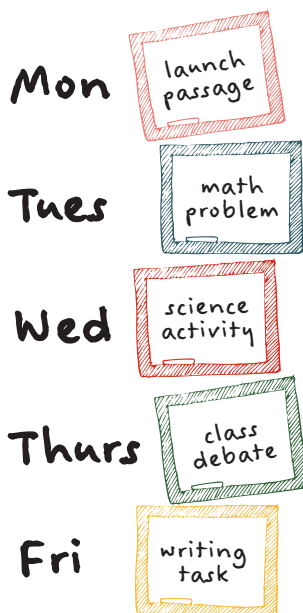
How WordGen WEEKLY Works

An introductory guide for middle school teachers to get started using SERP's original interdisciplinary academic language program

The original Word Generation program (*WordGen Weekly*) is a supplementary curricular resource that offers a series of discussable dilemmas designed to promote students' academic language and argumentation skills. WordGen Weekly creates the opportunity for students to become familiar with current issues and persistent dilemmas, while acquiring skills prioritized in the 21st century learning standards. The program is unique in its cross-disciplinary design, giving teachers of ELA, science, social studies, and math the chance to collaborate on the shared goal of helping students use academic language to articulate their thinking. Series (or individual units) can be used school-wide in grades 6–8.



- Three “series” (years) of materials, with 24 one-week units per series
- Series/units can be used in any order
- Units focus on a social or civic dilemma
- Five connected 15–20 minute activities for ELA, math, science, and social studies
- Five academic “focus words” emphasized per week

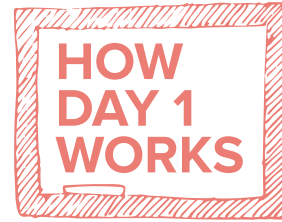


Daily instructional activities designed to build the vocabulary of middle school students through repeated exposure to academic words in various contexts

So much more than a vocabulary program!

WordGen Weekly:

- ▶ Builds the **reasoning and argumentation** skills that are necessary for learning in all content areas.
- ▶ Builds **reading comprehension** and content-area literacy by providing students with motivating text, **opportunities for discussion and debate, and weekly writing.**
- ▶ Sets students on a path to **college and career readiness** by providing multiple perspectives on complex problems, and requiring that students **sift through evidence** that supports or contradicts particular perspectives.



Five academic focus words are embedded in the weekly activities to provide opportunities for students to read the words and establish a context for their meaning.

Word Generation

UNIT 3.01

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

This week's issue:

SHOULD SCHOOL BE A PLACE FOR DEBATE?

Each unit focuses on a civic or social dilemma designed to develop students' academic language and argumentation skills.

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Launch passage provides opportunities to read the words in context and associate meaning.

is about the questions What year for students th tells the Friday, they

the civil rights movement. She asks her students, "Is peaceful protest the best way to make things change for the better?" The students have a debate. Some think Martin Luther King Jr. was right to tell protesters to avoid violence. Others believe that sometimes violence is necessary when people will not listen to reason. They ask Ms. Miles for the right answer, but she says there is no right answer.

Some people believe that kids in school should only learn about facts. These people think students should get information from their textbooks or teachers and memorize it. That way, some argue, all students will learn the same things and they will all be able to do well on tests.

Other people think debates can be hard because there are no right answers. Sometimes everybody learns different things from a debate. This makes it hard for teachers to give a test to find out what students have learned. Debates also take a lot of time. Teachers who have debates may not be able to cover as many topics in class. Then, students may not learn all of the facts in the textbook.



Questions for Classroom Discussion:

- From the description of debates in this passage, what do you think classroom debates look and sound like?
What arguments does the passage present that debating in school is a bad idea? A good idea?
Does this passage justify both sides of the controversy? Or do you believe this is a biased account of the controversy of debating in schools?
Why do you think the passage began with two short stories about two different classrooms?
Have you ever participated in a debate? What do you think makes a good debate? What can make debates difficult?

Discussion questions accompany each launch passage and check students' understanding of the passage while tapping into their beliefs about the week's topic.

Launch This Week's Issue (Usually led by ELA teacher)

- 1. Introduce the topic of the week, providing students the opportunity to discuss their perspectives with a partner.
2. Read or have volunteers read the passage aloud, stopping to discuss the passage. Examples of questions for classroom discussion are noted on the launch passage of each unit.



Teaching tip: Many WordGen Weekly topics are highly controversial. It is important to establish discussion norms to hold students accountable for respectful, equitable, and productive discussions.



Resources on establishing norms are available on the WordGen website.

- 3. Discuss the various positions presented in the passage. Encourage students to begin developing a claim, an arguable statement about the topic.



Teaching tip: Explain to students that the lessons present information that can be used to argue both for and against particular claims. Also, each day's lesson adds a bit more information, so it is important to participate in all the activities.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ Model fluent reading of the passage by having the teacher or a fluent reader read the passage while the class follows along.
✓ Model reading and thinking strategies in context. Encourage the use of highlighters or sticky notes to annotate the text.



SHOULD SCHOOL BE A PLACE FOR DEBATE?

UNIT 3.01

Student-friendly definitions and sample sentences are included for each word.



controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

debate (noun) a discussion of a problem where different sides are presented

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* In Ms. Miles' classroom, students had a **debate** about whether junk food should be sold in schools.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Can you think of a **debate** that caused you to change your mind? What was it about?

***debate** (verb) to argue about an issue; to consider different options in order to make a decision

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* Cecelia **debated** whether to drive or take the bus to the concert.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Have you ever **debated** cutting your hair short or growing it long? What was your decision?

controversy (noun) major disagreement or dispute among many people

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* The biggest **controversy** in the sixth grade last year was whether or not students would be required to wear school uniforms.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Why is there so much **controversy** surrounding school uniforms?

perspective (noun) point of view, way of looking at things

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* All of my friends have a unique **perspective** about which teacher is the best.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* What's your **perspective** on whether or not people should be able to keep wild animals as pets?

justify (verb) to defend, explain, or show to be right

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* Carl **justified** his decision to punch Roger by explaining that Roger punched him first.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Do you think people are **justified** in using violence after others use violence against them first?

bias (noun) the belief that some people or ideas are better than others, prejudice

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* Jonas' **bias** against school uniforms comes from his experience in a very strict private school.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Do you expect history books to have **bias**? Why or why not?

***bias** (verb) to strongly influence someone for or against something

⇒ *Sample Sentence:* Raphael didn't want to **bias** his friends against the band, so he decided not to mention that they don't write any of their songs.

🗣️ *Turn and Talk:* Does hearing about musicians' bad behavior **bias** you against their music? Explain.

Turn and Talk format encourages students to deepen their understanding of the unit focus words through discussion.

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Use the Focus Words

(Usually led by ELA teacher)

4. Introduce the unit focus words by displaying each word, reading each word aloud, and having students repeat each word.



Teaching tip: Establish a routine to introduce and review the focus words.

5. Build students' understanding of the focus words using the definitions, sample sentences, and Turn and Talk prompts.



Teaching tip: Throughout the week, teachers can use this page as a reference and/or for review.

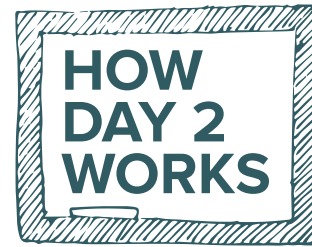


Resources for effective strategies for vocabulary instruction, including vocabulary cards, are available on the WordGen website.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ Make word learning fun! Recognize students who use the focus words during and outside of class time.
- ✓ Encourage students to acknowledge the focus words throughout their daily discussions.
- ✓ Creatively display the focus words on a word wall. Display the current words on an active word wall and retire the previously used words to a designated location in the room where students can reference previously taught words throughout the year.
- ✓ Encourage experimentation with the words and use mistakes as teachable moments.



SHOULD SCHOOL BE A PLACE FOR DEBATE?

Focus words embedded in the activity provide opportunities for students to read the words and establish a mathematical context.

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

DO THE MATH

Option 1: In the Urban **Debate** League, students from city schools **debate** controversial issues. A skillful debater can **justify** more than one **perspective**. For example, a debater might start by arguing that her school should have a dress code. Then, she can change positions and argue that her school should not have a dress code. The debater puts personal **biases** aside.

A total of 56 students participated in the Urban **Debate** League championships. They were:

- 10 ninth graders
- 14 tenth graders
- 20 eleventh graders
- 12 twelfth graders

What percentage of the students were in tenth grade?

- A. 14%
- B. 25%
- C. 55%
- D. 75%

Math lessons offer selected and open-ended response questions.

Real-world math problems are related to the weekly topic.

Option 2: Urban Debaters **debate** controversial issues in teams of two. In each **debate**, a team either argues from an affirmative or negative **perspective**. Teams must be affirmative in some **debates**, and negative in others. Even if a debater is **biased** toward one opinion, she must skillfully argue both sides. Judges choose the winning team based on how well team members **justify** each **perspective**.

In a **debate** round, each of the 4 debaters talks 3 times: an 8-minute speech, a 5-minute response, and a 6-minute question period. Gabriel is organizing a school **debate**. He wants to know how many whole **debate** rounds can happen in 4 hours if everybody uses all their time. Write an inequality that would help him figure this out. You can let r = the number of **debate** rounds.

$$4(8 \text{ minutes} + 5 \text{ minutes} + 6 \text{ minutes}) \leq 240 \text{ minutes, or } 76r \leq 240$$

Discussion Question: High school debaters tend to get good grades and go to college. Some people say this **justifies** using **debate** in the classroom. Others have a different, controversial **perspective**. They say that kids join **debate** teams because they are already smart and motivated. They say **debate** won't help regular kids. What do you think?

Discussion questions accompany each math lesson. This allows the teacher to connect the math activity to the topic, tap into students' beliefs about the week's topic, and provide an opportunity to explicitly use the focus words.

Do the Math

(Usually led by math teacher)

1. Review the focus words.



Teaching tip: Ask students to think about and explain how the focus words can be used in a math classroom.

2. Read and solve the math problem(s) that relate to the weekly topic. Option 1 usually involves a simple operation presented in a selected response format. Option 2 is an open-ended response question and is typically more challenging for students.



Teaching tip: Students may work in pairs or groups to encourage discussion about the math problem.

3. Facilitate a class discussion using the discussion question at the end of the lesson.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ If the math problems are out of reach for your students, discuss and solve Option 1 as a class or in groups. Problems can also be used to demonstrate the proper use of problem solving strategies.
- ✓ The lesson is designed to take 15–20 minutes; however, class discussions can prolong the lessons. Some teachers use timers to streamline instructional procedures and routines in WordGen Weekly classrooms.
- ✓ The discussion questions at the end of the lesson provide a format for connecting the math activity to the topic, explicitly using the focus words, and tapping into students' beliefs.
- ✓ Encourage students to use the focus words in the discussion and use mistakes as teachable moments.

HOW DAY 3 WORKS

SHOULD
Hypothetical scenarios reinforce scientific thinking.

DEBATE FOR DEBATE?
Focus words embedded in the activity provide opportunities for students to read the words and establish a scientific context.
controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

THINK SCIENTIFICALLY
Ms. Lexie Kahn and Mr. Paul E. Seemy are two science teachers who work together. Being science teachers, they encourage their students to be curious and ask a lot of questions. Some of their students like to ask questions about national **controversies**. Others ask questions about experiences that have made them wonder about something. Ms. Kahn and Mr. Seemy themselves often have different **perspectives**, and they like to **debate** each other. They try not to let personal **biases** get in the way of exchanging ideas, so they use evidence to **justify** their opinions. Both teachers believe that **debating** develops intelligence just as physical exercise develops muscles. They think that you become smarter by working through challenging problems. Some of their students agree with this, but others do not. The doubtful students seem to believe that people have a fixed amount of intelligence that stays the same no matter what.

Mr. Seemy's student Joon found this topic very interesting, so he decided to survey the students at his school.

Joon wants to find out:
What mindset have middle school students developed about whether or not intelligence grows?

Joon designed a survey with one item.

Procedure:

1. Distribute surveys to all students at school.
2. Ask students to place completed surveys in a box in the library labeled "completed surveys."
3. Tally the survey results.

Data:

	Fixed Mindset (intelligence does not change)	Growth Mindset (intelligence can change with effort)
Sixth Grade	122	75
Seventh Grade	99	110
Eighth Grade	80	78

Data tables, charts, and graphs provide opportunities to interpret data and draw conclusions.

What do the data from Joon's survey tell you?
Sixth graders are more likely to have a fixed mindset (62%), whereas seventh graders (47% fixed) and eighth graders (51% fixed) are split fairly evenly.

How would you answer Joon's survey? Why?
Answers will vary.

Do you think that Joon's survey provides enough information to determine a student's mindset? Why or why not?
Answers will vary.

Stanford University professor Dr. Carol Dweck reports from her research that people with a "growth mindset" live less

Opportunities for discussion and writing encourage scientific thinking while exploring the weekly topic.

Think Scientifically

(Usually led by science teacher)

1. Review the focus words.



Teaching tip: Ask students to think about and explain how the focus words can be used in a science classroom.

2. Read and discuss the *Think Scientifically* passage, allowing students to interpret the data and draw conclusions.



Teaching tip: Students may work in pairs or groups to encourage discussion about the lesson.

3. Facilitate a class discussion using the discussion question at the end of the lesson.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ The lesson is designed to take 15–20 minutes; however, class discussions can prolong the lessons. Some teachers use timers to streamline instructional procedures and routines in WordGen Weekly classrooms.
- ✓ Encourage students to make connections between the weekly topic and the data in the science experiment.
- ✓ Encourage students to use the focus words in the discussion and use mistakes as teachable moments.

HOW DAY 4 WORKS

SHOULD SCHOOL BE A PLACE FOR DEBATE?

Students are encouraged to use focus words to develop their argument.

UNIT 3.01



controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

Debates are necessary for learning.

OR

B

Debates do not belong in school.

OR

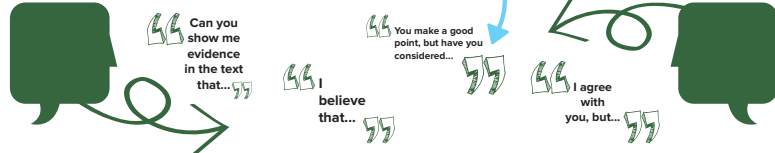
CREATE YOUR OWN

Positions are chosen and evidence is gathered to support a claim.

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Academic language supports prepare students to engage in debate activities as they use evidence from multiple sources to develop arguments.

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:



Debate the Issue

(Usually led by social studies teacher)

1. Review the focus words.
2. Review the discussion norms.
3. Review the debate question and the positions.
4. Let teams pick a position, or assign positions if necessary to ensure both sides are represented.
5. Give each team a few minutes to develop their claim, accumulate evidence supporting or countering their position, explain their reasoning about the connections, and take notes in preparation for the debate.
6. Select a debate format and explain the procedure to students.



Teaching tip: In the early weeks and months, reviewing discussion norms is likely to be required routinely. Over time students will internalize the norms.



Debate resources are available on the WordGen website.

7. Debate the issue!



Rubrics for discussion and debate are available on the WordGen website.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ Debates in WordGen Weekly are planned classroom activities in which particular claims are discussed, and students plan together to present and defend their claim. The purpose is not winning or losing the debate; the purpose is to develop students' abilities to think through a set of claims or arguments in order to deepen their understanding and enhance their ability to learn.
- ✓ Many teachers create debate organizers or provide chart paper for students to write their arguments. This can serve as a pre-writing activity for the "take a stand" essay the next day.
- ✓ Discussion norms should be established early on to encourage student engagement and to make the class environment a safe place to discuss freely and to debate ideas. Some teachers have students participate in setting norms. At a minimum, discussion norms should establish expectations for respectful disagreement and establish practices that allow all students to participate. Post norms in the classroom as a reminder.
- ✓ During the debate, encourage students to share, clarify, and expand their thoughts using academically productive talk, and to listen and respond to the ideas of others.

HOW DAY 5 WORKS

SHOULD SCHOOLS BE A PLACE FOR DEBATE?

Students are encouraged to use focus words to construct their written argument.

UNIT 3.01

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

controversy | justify | perspective | bias | debate

Students are given an opportunity to develop an argument based on the unit's question and use evidence accumulated during the week's activities to justify their reasoning.

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Take a Stand

(Usually led by ELA teacher)

1. Review the displayed focus words.
2. Introduce the writing assignment.



Teaching tip: Students should use evidence to support their written argument. Possible sources of evidence are the launch passage, math activity, science activity, and debate.

3. Students write an essay taking a stand on the issue.



Instructional Considerations:

- ✓ The writing assignments can change throughout the year based on the needs of your students. Teachers have used WordGen Weekly writing assignments as quick-writes, free-writes, information pieces, letters, and argumentative writing pieces. The main goal of the writing assignment is for students to make a claim and justify that claim with evidence from the text using academic language.



A rubric for argumentative writing can be found on the WordGen website.



More resources available online! wordgen.serpmedia.org

> Download Center for Students

Students can access individual units for free (no registration necessary).

> Download Center for Teachers (simple registration required)

Teachers can access student materials and teacher editions for free. Both color and grayscale PDFs available.

> Teacher Resources

- Focus word vocabulary cards
- Information about academic language and vocabulary instruction
- Vocabulary assessments
- Activities to develop discussion and debate in the classroom
- Rubrics for discussion, debate, and argumentative writing
- Professional learning opportunities
- Interviews with the developers of the program
- Videos of Word Generation classrooms
- Topic lists
- Focus word lists

Much more!