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.

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.

Support for Word Generation provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Noyce Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Leon Lowenstein Foundation, and the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education through grant numbers R305A090555 and R305F100026.
In room 207, Mr. Smith is teaching his students about the civil rights movement. He asks the students questions about 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 facts in school. They learn about their own beliefs about the facts they learn in school are important. We live in a democracy, where everyone needs to know how to form and defend an opinion in order to work together to make decisions. Youn people will not always have a teacher or a textbook to give them the answers they need to defend an opinion. They may need to learn to think for themselves. Some people believe that kids in school should only learn facts in school. They learn about their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own biases and understand a problem in a new way. Through a classroom debate, students hear their classmates’ opinions. Students justify their opinions with evidence from texts and from their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own biases and understand a problem in a new way. Hearing classmates’ perspectives during a debate can help students understand the complexity of many important issues. Whether it is better to have teachers teach 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 facts in school. They learn about their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own biases and understand a problem in a new way. Through a classroom debate, students hear their classmates’ opinions. Students justify their opinions with evidence from texts and from their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own biases and understand a problem in a new way. Hearing classmates’ perspectives during a debate can help students understand the complexity of many important issues. Whether it is better to have teachers teach the text or to have students engage in debates is a continuing controversy in education. What do you think? Should students learn only facts in school? Or should debates be an important part of their education?

Launch This Week’s Issue

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.

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

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.
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?

DO THE MATH

Option 1: In the Urban Debate League, students from city schools debate controversial issues. A skilled 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. $75\%$

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 $r$ be the number of debate rounds.

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

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.

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.
**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.

**HOW DAY 3 WORKS**

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

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### Data

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**Hypothetical scenarios reinforce scientific thinking.**

**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.

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**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.
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.
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.

Take a Stand
(Usually led by ELA teacher)

1. Review the displayed focus words.
2. Introduce the writing assignment.
3. Students write an essay taking a stand on the issue.

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.
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!