Introduction
Over the past ten years, coaches who have attended my National Debate Education Project seminars have asked me if there was an event I could recommend that could give their students exposure to Lincoln-Douglas debate without the topic preparation and need for training in debate theory.
My answer has been to try Spontaneous Argumentation or “Spar” for short. Spar combines elements of the Lincoln-Douglas debate format with the spontaneity of impromptu speaking and can be used in the classroom for non-forensic students as well as an individual event at tournaments. Popular in several states and offered at several college invitational tournaments, Spar gives non-debate competitors exposure to an argumentation event without extensive preparation and allows competitors to utilize skills which are familiar to them.

About the Event
The most common method of incorporating Spar into forensic tournaments is to offer it as an individual event. Given the time frame for each debate (10-12 minutes on average) it is best to assign students into panels of six, yielding three debates per section. Student speakers #1 and #2 debate each other, followed by #3 vs. #4, then #5 vs. #6. Topics are different for each debate. Much like impromptu speaking, there is often a theme for each round but each pair debates a different resolution. Most tournaments include at least one round of humorous or “lighter” topics. Here are some examples:

Serious topics
• Teen curfews are a good idea
• The death penalty should be abolished
• Sport utility vehicles should be banned
• The U.S. should eliminate the national debt before cutting taxes
• The press should not report on the private lives of famous people

Humorous or lighter topics
• The earth is really flat
• Elvis is still alive
• Humpty Dumpty was pushed!
• The U.S. should be ruled by a monarch
• Daria is better than The Simpsons

To begin the debate, the judge hands both debaters slips of paper with the resolution printed on them for their consideration. After a 10-15 second review period, the judge flips a coin and the student who wins the coin toss chooses to be affirmative or negative on the resolution. After a one or two minute preparation period in which both debaters prepare, the affirmative speaker begins the debate. There is usually no preparation time beyond this initial period.

Five events within a Spontaneous Argumentation Round:
• Affirmative position statement which lasts no more than two minutes;
• Negative position statement which lasts no more than two minutes;
• Clash period, during which each student may ask the other questions and also respond to those asked of her or him. No one “owns” the clash period and the session can be quite lively with a lot of give-and-take but students are rated on maintaining a balance of courtesy, professionalism, and assertiveness during the clash period;
• Negative summary statement which lasts no more than one minute; and
• Affirmative summary statement which lasts no more than one minute.

Tips for Successful Spar Debating
Here are a few tips for students who wish to try Spontaneous Argumentation:

• Position statements: Limit your focus to one or two main issues. Successful Spar competitors combine elements of both impromptu and basic debate into their position statements which include:
  • Introduction
  • Statement of the resolution
  • Main point
  • Analysis and reasoning
  • Example or hypothetical situation illustrating main point

• Clash period: Be firm but reasonable. The clash period is enjoyable for everyone if the debaters take turns asking a question or lines of questions. Debaters who are overly-aggressive or rude are penalized by the judge. Courtesy, professionalism, and assertiveness should be balanced.

• Summary statements: Be sure to contrast and compare your and your opponent’s positions. Do not get bogged down squabbling over petty details. Summarize your main points. Be sure to conclude on a strong note—a vivid story, example, or clever quote are all memorable ways of closing your statement.

• Serious topics: Since no “evidence” is allowed in Spar, focus on support based on general knowledge as well as logic and reasoning. Arguments should not require excessive explanation nor be so bizarre that a reasonable person would not accept them.

• Silly/light topics: Have fun and keep the humor in good taste. Storytelling and a quick wit (play on words, clichés, and witty sayings) will take you far in Spar.
SPAR PLANNING SHEET

Introduction: ________________________________________________________________

Statement of the resolution: Resolved __________________________________________

Main point #1: ______________________________________________________________
Example: ____________________________________________________________________

Main point #2: ______________________________________________________________
Example: ____________________________________________________________________

Notes for Rebuttal: __________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Topics:

1) Resolved: ________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

2) Resolved: ______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

3) Resolved: ______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

4) Resolved: ______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

5) Resolved: ______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________