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The following lesson plan is the result of the joined effort of an international team of trainers. Their focus is to improve quality of debate training. Therefore, an important part of this endeavour is the feedback users provide.

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Lesson plan - Definitions

A. Goal of the lesson

Debaters will learn what difference can definition do for the debate, how to define debate and what kind of unfair definitions could be rejected.

B. Activities

Exercise (10min.)

Debaters are divided into groups (about 4-5 debaters each). Groups should draw pictures of words trainer will give them. Each group works alone but words are same for all groups. Trainer gives words such as animal, castle, storm, vehicle, tree. Words are selected in such a way that there is a scope of different visual representations one can think of when word is pronounced. After three or four words groups will share their drawings. Ideally most of the drawings will be different in specificity and object drawn but all will represent given word (vehicle can be drawn as bike or car etc.).

Trainer then moderates discussion why different groups came up with different representations. At the end they should recognize that words mean slightly different things for different people and therefore to debate properly one has to specify words in the given motion.

Lecture (20 min.)

Trainer can base lecture on the text from Harvey-Smith, N. 2011. The Practical Guide to Debating: Worlds Style/British Parliamentary Style. kap. Appendix B. pg. 161-166.

Debaters should learn what good definition means, how to approach motion, when it is appropriate to challenge the definitions. Also how to interpret motion correctly and examples of types of bad definitions. Debater should understand when place and time setting of the motion is unfair, what is squirrel and weasel. Trainer should stress that not all instances of time and place setting are incorrect and that sometimes they can be also desirable.

Exercise (15 min.)



Debaters are divided into groups (about 4-5 debaters each). Each group will get three motion with definitions (two definitions are unfair, one is acceptable). Groups will decide if they consider definitions acceptable. If not they are supposed to come up with better definitions. After ten minutes all groups present their opinions and definitions.

C. Preparation

For this topic you can also take a look at Quinn, S. 2005. Debating. pg. 10 – 20. Motions and definitions for second exercise have prepared beforehand. Please prepare for different groups different examples of bad definitions. Among acceptable definitions should be also correct instances of place and time setting.

D. Hints

When using examples of bad definitions in lecture or exercise part of the session, try to avoid obvious / grossly hyperbolized bad definitions and work rather with real examples which occurred in your circuit.

E. Verification

Do not forget to conclude the session with making sure everyone understand the concept of definitions and its importance in debate. You can have someone to conclude main points learned. Also, you can use direct questions, such as:

- What are definitions in terms of debate?
- Why do we need to think of definitions before debate?
- How do we use definitions during debate itself?