Debate Guidelines & Format

Debates Topic:
For example: implementing national universal childcare

Choosing debate teams:
Have all students in the class form a line extending from those most in agreement with implementing national universal childcare to those least in favour (this is a "vote with your feet" activity: those on one side of the room are firmly in favour; those on the other are firmly against; those unsure or "on the fence" hover in the middle) of the room. Divide the line in two, then ensure that students are take a position *against* their initial inclination: those students who initially indicated they were "for" universal childcare have to develop arguments against it, and vice versus. This encourages students to consider carefully the "other side" of the issue.

Ground Rules:
- Respect, professionalism, collegiality, and authenticity (based in real facts/arguments)
- Everyone must speak at least once—aim to even out speaking time
- We'll assign a timekeeper for each debate who will ensure everyone respects the time limits below

Format:
> Preparation in groups – 30 minutes
> *[Students will have read a package of materials on the issue prior to coming to class. They will develop speaking points based on those readings during this time.]*
>
> **Opening Statements** (summary of position and main arguments)
> > FOR – 1 minute
> > AGAINST – 1 minute
>
> **Presentation of Main Arguments**
> > FOR – 5 minutes
> > AGAINST – 5 minutes
>
> *Reconvene with your group – 5 minutes*
>
> **Open Debate** (questions to opposing side; equal time given to each team)
> > 10 minutes total
>
> *Reconvene with your group – 5 minutes*
>
> **Closing Statements**
> > AGAINST – 2 minutes
> > FOR – 2 minutes

Post debate:
Discuss the experience on two levels: 1) the substance of the debate, ie. overarching themes and enduring conflicts (what, at root, is really at issue here?); 2) the debate process, ie. the experience of arguing a position that was not your initial personal position and which argumentative techniques were most effective).