IT’S UP FOR DEBATE:
Should the United States Ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Goal:
- Increase awareness of the CRC
- Learn about the ratification process for international treaties.
- Practice public-speaking skills.
- Practice research skills
- Learn and practice debate skills
- Form an opinion on whether or not the United States should ratify the CRC.

Materials:
- Copies of CRC Debate Source Book: (Need web address)
- Art supplies (i.e., markers, colored pencils, crayons)
- Note cards or paper and pens
- Stopwatch or other timer
- Copies of Handout A, Debate Score Sheet

Note: This lesson includes only a brief introduction to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For more in-depth lessons on the CRC, see earlier lessons in this resource.

Part I: Introduction to the Issue (15—20 minutes)

1. Ask participants if they are familiar with the term “convention” and ask them to offer a definition. Note that while they may be familiar with the term to describe a large meeting of people or a rule of behavior, there is a third meaning that builds off the first two. Explain that a convention is also a type of treaty—a formal agreement usually open for participation by the international community as a whole, or by a large number of governments. Ask participants for examples of conventions or treaties that they have heard about.

2. Write “Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)” on the board. Ask, by a show of hands, if participants have heard of this agreement. If relevant, have a couple of volunteers tell what they know about the CRC. Explain that the CRC, which recognizes and protects the rights of children, is the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history, with all nations except the USA having ratified it.

3. Ask participants if they are surprised that the United States stands alone among nations in not ratifying the CRC. Ask why they think the United States might have signed but not ratified the convention.

4. Explain that they will be engaging in a research project to learn more about the CRC, and they will ultimately participate in a debate about whether or not the United States should ratify it. Distribute the CRC Debate Source Book and explain that it will be used as a starting point for learning about the CRC and gathering evidence for their debates.
Assignment participants to review specific parts of the CRC Debate Source Book in preparation for subsequent sessions. Recommend sources about child rights in the USA such as:

- **Q&A: The Convention on the Rights of the Child**
- **The Rights of the Child in the United States**

**Part II: Preparing to Debate**

- Tell participants that debate is a useful exercise in clarifying one’s own stance on an issue by holding it up against opposing arguments. Explain that we may maintain or change our positions as a result, but regardless we seek to understand and respect the viewpoints of others. Emphasize that throughout this exercise, arguments should be respectful and focused on positions and facts, not used to judge others; offensive remarks and putdowns are unacceptable.

- Engage participants in one or more of the following activities in order to prepare them for thinking critically about the CRC and US ratification, as well as for the forthcoming debate.

  **A. Because, And, But, Still (15 minutes)**

  Have participants form a circle and select a volunteer to begin. The volunteer begins by stating either “The United States should ratify the CRC...” or “The United States should not ratify the CRC...” The participant then adds a statement beginning with “because,” “and,” “but,” or “still.” For example, “The United States should ratify the CRC...BECAUSE it is the only convention intended to protect children,” or “The United States should not ratify the CRC, BUT should still take steps to protect children’s rights,” etc.

  Participants continue around the circle until each has made one statement about the CRC. (Note: Depending on the size of the group, this activity can be done in smaller groups.)

  **B. Four Corners (30 minutes)**

  Prior to the lesson, prepare four signs with the following labels and post them in different corners of the room:
  *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.*

  Present the following statement to participants: “The United States should ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” Ask participants to think for
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a few minutes about the statement, and to physically move to the corner of the room with which they most identify.

Appoint one participant in each group to be the note taker, and have participants in each group spend 5-10 minutes discussing and recording the reasons they picked their corner.

Ask each group to summarize their reasons by writing a brief, persuasive statement supporting their position. Have each group designate one person to read the argument aloud to the rest of the group. Direct all participants to take notes on the various arguments they hear.

Conclude by having participants individually write a paragraph stating their position on US ratification of the CRC (e.g., “I strongly agree that the United States should/should not ratify the CRC because...”). Participants should include in their paragraphs the four strongest points supporting their position. Have volunteers read aloud their paragraphs and report whether or not they changed their original position based upon the arguments they heard from others.

C. Alley Debate (45 minutes)

Divide participants into two groups. Assign one group to be “Affirmative” and the other to be “Dissenting.” Read aloud or post the following statement: “The United States should ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

In their groups, have participants generate affirmative or dissenting arguments, depending on which group they were assigned. Encourage participants to look through their CRC Debate Source Books and use statements or facts from the articles. Instruct them to come up with one argument for each participant in the group (i.e., a small group of 10 participants should generate 10 arguments). If this is too challenging due to large group size, more than two groups can be formed (e.g., form four groups—two affirmative and two dissenting).

Have each participant select a different argument and write it on a sheet of paper. On the back of the paper, have them use art supplies to create a graffiti-style representation of the argument (e.g., using symbols, pictures, and/or stylized text).

Have each group line up so that they are facing each other, holding up their graffiti signs. Alternating between lines, have participants state their arguments, one at a time, either for or against the topic.

Once all participants have presented, have them get back into their groups and identify arguments that specifically refute the other side’s statements. Meanwhile,
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recreate each “alley” by hanging participants’ signs in a prominent place in the room.

Invite participants to “tag” the opposing group’s signs by adding their names and their own participants’ statements. Then have each group return to their own “alley” and process the refuting statements.

Facilitate a debrief discussion to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and refuting statements.

Part III: Engaging in Debate (30—45 minutes + time for research and preparation in or out of session)

• Have participants work in small groups or as a whole group to develop a resolution. (Alternatively you can present one to the whole group.) The wording should be simple and clear, balanced yet provocative, and stated in a positive form. For example, “The United States Senate should ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in order to protect children domestically and internationally.”
• Choose a participant to be moderator. The moderator should prepare for the following roles:
  • Introducing and briefly summarizing the topic, and defining key terms
  • Introducing the debaters
  • Keeping time
  • Calling on opposing debaters and/or other participants after each speech to ask questions
  • Providing a 1–2 minute summary at the end of the debate reflecting the main issues presented by each side.
• Select six participants to participate in the debate and divide them into two “panels”—affirmative and dissenting. Assign them to research and develop arguments using the following parameters:
  • Each member of the panel must identify three sources of information for both the affirmative and dissenting sides. Only two of the three sources may be from the CRC Debate Source Book. One piece must come from general research.
  • Each piece of research must be cited in MLA bibliographic format.
  • Each of the panelists must be prepared to share their research with the other panel members.
• The rest of the group will be audience participants. Have them perform the tasks below/prepare for the following roles:
  • Write a paragraph stating their opinion on the topic prior to the debate.
  • Prepare questions about the topic prior to the debate and ask pertinent questions during the cross-examination part of the debate.
  • Take notes on and score the presentations during the debate (see Handout A, Debate Score Sheet).
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- Indicate any change in their opinion about the topic after the debate.
- Write an evaluation of the debate.
- Indicate any change in their opinion about the topic after the debate.
- After completing their research, have the panelists prepare for the debate by dividing arguments equally among team members and planning their speeches according to the following format:
  - The first affirmative speaker presents two arguments in favor of the resolution with evidence to support each argument.
  - The first dissenting speaker presents two arguments against the resolution with evidence to support each argument, and refutes the affirmative speaker’s arguments.
  - The second affirmative speaker presents at least one new argument in favor of the resolution with evidence to support it, and refutes the dissenting speaker’s arguments.
  - The second dissenting speaker presents at least one new argument against the resolution with evidence to support it, and refutes the previous speaker’s arguments.
  - The third affirmative speaker presents any remaining arguments in favor of the resolution with evidence to support it, and offers a final statement in favor of the resolution.
  - The third dissenting speaker presents any remaining arguments against the resolution with evidence to support it, and offers a final statement of the dissenting position.
- Have the moderator introduce and facilitate the debate using the following timetable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderator introduction</th>
<th>2-3 minutes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First affirmative speaker</td>
<td>2-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>First dissenting speaker</td>
<td>2-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross examination/questions from audience</td>
<td>1-3 minutes</td>
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<td>Second affirmative speaker</td>
<td>2-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second dissenting speaker</td>
<td>2-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross examination/questions from audience</td>
<td>1-3 minutes</td>
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<td>Third affirmative speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third dissenting speaker</td>
<td>2-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross examination/questions from audience</td>
<td>1-3 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderator summary</td>
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</table>

Source: Adapted from TeachUnicef.
# DEBATE SCORE SHEET

**Moderator Name:**  
Topic: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening Speech</th>
<th>Above and Beyond!</th>
<th>Really Good!</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>So-So</th>
<th>Didn’t Understand</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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**Panelist Name:**  
Topic: 

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Learning Activity 6