

Power league

An activity idea from Futurelab, linked to our IT and Youth Work feature.

UK Youth is using it to find out about people's Vision for the Future of Education – you can use it, too!

Power League is a way of stimulating discussion, using the internet to give feedback on how groups are thinking. UK Youth is using it to collect ideas about the future of education. Here we look at the idea and how you can use it.

The Power League encourages people to cast votes by choosing between two competing people, ideas or things. In a discussion on technology, for example, they could vote for which they thought was more

useful: mobile phones or MP3 players. In a

discussion on leadership, they could vote for who ought to lead the world:

Mahatma Gandhi or Bono.

Each student chooses one out of a series of random pairs.

By repeatedly casting votes and making either/or choices the group members create a league, ranked in order of the most powerful, important or influential. The results are often unexpected – people can be surprised to see how their peers voted – and a good starting point for discussion. Why does this person have more power than another person? What makes this pop star more influential than that politician? How is this power used?

The league was originally designed as a fun way to explore the nature of power.

But it has now been adapted so that participants can vote on any subject: which is the bigger cause of global warming, for example; or which is the more important invention?

The process starts with a question that group members will be interested in and that will provoke debate. Opposite are some suggestions for using the publicly available leagues.

Power League is based on the original World Power League concept developed by Lucy Kimbell, Barby Asante, George Grinstead and Rachel Collinson, in collaboration with Futurelab.

Material on these pages is edited and adapted from material on the Power League website.

go ▶ for more about Power League.

go ▶ to vote for your vision of education.

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1 World Power league

League question: "Who do you wish had the most power?"

People listed in the league include: Michael Moore, Bill Gates, Davina McCall, Warren Buffet, Ché Guevara, Mohamed Al Fayed, Satoru Iwata and many more.

Discussion ideas: You can use the league to explore different kinds of power: social, political, cultural, economic and spiritual, for example. Which kinds of power is it better to have? Which kind of power enables you to influence the most people?

Participants can also think about why different group members prioritise different forms of power, and justify their opinions. It's a good way of understanding that other people's choices may be underpinned by different sets of values.

2 Important inventions

League question: "Which do you think is the most important invention?"

League items include: Antibiotics, the wheel, cars, mobile phones, paper, television, nuclear power and many more.

Discussion ideas: What makes an invention important? Is it the ability to save lives, or the ability to improve the quality of life? Is it something that brings a small benefit to a lot of people or a large benefit to a few people? What are the hidden or unexpected benefits that an invention might bring? Is 'important' the same as 'good'? An invention might be hugely influential, but its influence could be destructive as well as benign.

3 Most evil

League question: "Who do you think is the most evil?"

League items include: Bart Simpson, Batman, Boo Radley, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Lady Macbeth, Piggy, Darth Vader.

Discussion ideas: What do we mean by evil? Is there universal agreement on what constitutes evil, or is it culturally and historically relative? Are people born evil or do they become evil? Are people able to control behaviour through free will or is their behaviour determined by their genes or their social circumstances?

Accessing Power Leagues

There are two main ways of using the Power League:

Using a public league: You can take part in any of the public leagues that you see on the Power league home page. When you click on one of the leagues you will be taken to a voting page, where you are presented with a question, such as "who do you wish had most power?" and two items from which to make a choice. You will also see a link that says "View this league". Clicking this will show you how the items in the league are currently positioned based on the votes that have been registered so far — the highest number of 'winning' votes at the top, and the lowest at the bottom.

Creating your own league: You need to register on the Power League site to start creating your own leagues. Simply click on the "Register now" link and complete the form. Once you have registered and activated your account (by e-mail) you will be able to start making your own leagues by clicking on the "Make new league: start" link.

Leading a good debate

The aim is to guide the debate in a way that enables everyone to have a say, and to help everyone develop opinions that are based on evidence, not just the loudest voices.

Here are some ways you can structure the discussion to ensure a good debate:

- Set out ground rules for the discussion: for example, setting time limits on the length of time each group member speaks, or specifying that group members must raise hands before speaking.
- Experiment with layout, perhaps sitting in a large circle or in groups around tables.
- Start in small groups, and then choose one member from each group to present the group's thoughts to the rest of the larger group.
- Insist that everyone presents evidence for each point they make.
- Provide sentence frameworks to help them construct arguments — "I think is more powerful because my evidence for this is"
- Display some key questions where everyone can see them. For example, if you are asking the group to discuss who is more powerful, you could ask them to think about what power consists of, what different kinds of power there are, and how power can be exercised.
- To help participants choose, generate questions as a whole group to help discussions: what are the most important characteristics, what are the pros and cons, what are the key differences between the two etc.
- Use turn-taking — make sure everyone has a say.
- Guide the discussion by summarising the points raised, and then moving the debate on.

Top tip: Encourage people to see the wider picture and not just give their own gut reaction by asking them to give the answer from someone else's point of view. Ask how would they vote if they were a poor farmer in Africa, for example, or a wealthy American, or a single mother, or a wheelchair user.

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