

**Friends Academy Middle School History Department**

Civics Discourse Contract

It is important to understand how to properly engage in political discussions, both in class and outside of it. Many people are quite passionate about politics. This often allows for engaging discussions. However, it can often lead to unnecessary hostility between people of differing ideas and even separation of students with opinions in the minority. *Our American democracy functions with the expectation that it’s people WILL have different opinions on how the government should run.* Our government functions best when those who disagree learn to compromise. Our classroom should function the same way. We must master the ability to talk across political and ideological differences. In order to create an environment where ALL opinions can be valued, welcomed, and heard, all students should follow these expectations:

1. In every discussion, we begin with a starting point of mutual respect and equality
   * Understand and keep in mind that we are ALL different, we have different: backgrounds, economic statuses, upbringing, heritages, races, cultures, etc.
   * DO NOT assume you know many of these things about each other
2. LISTENING to each other’s views does NOT simply mean hearing their words
   * Really engage and think about where they are coming from – this will help to allow for a greater understanding of the issue AND think about how that effects your point of view
3. Understand that a person whose opinion is different from your own does NOT mean they are: ignorant, uniformed, unintelligent, or irrational
   * There are a LARGE variety of people on each side of the political spectrum with a wide variety of views
   * People of differing opinions are differently informed than YOU are
4. **There are no winners or losers in a political discussion**
   * We are in this together – politics is not meant to be a battle (regardless of what you read or hear from partisan sources)
   * The goal is to learn things from one another’s differences
   * You MUST be ready to acknowledge that your argument could be proven wrong AND THIS IS PERFECTLY OKAY!!!
   * Both sides need to stay gracious in learning new points of view
5. Be aware where you are getting your information from and what has shaped your opinion
   * News/Media: Are you only getting information from one-sided media?
     + Also – keep in mind, media wants BATTLES, it sells more when there IS hostility between people
   * Parents, Friends, Teachers, Coaches: What are their political associations? Where are they getting their information from?
6. Remember your manners!
   * NEVER cut anyone off, try to be polite, and appropriate
7. Don’t dominate an entire discussion!
   * Some students may be more at ease with deliberation than others, they should learn to NOT be the lone voice and work to encourage others to speak out
   * Other voices must be heard, ESPECIALLY those in the minority –t*he minority voice cannot be silenced by those in the majority*
8. As always, follow the other rules of a discussion:
   * Back up your opinions with FACTS and support
   * Listen and build on another’s comments – address what the person before you said before going onto the next topic of discussion

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I have read and clearly understood the expectations written above. I understand that if I break any of these expectations that I could disrupt my classroom community.

Printed Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: X\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_