Objections!

Aim: Help students get comfortable with raising different kinds of objections to arguments through a short lesson plan followed by a fun and interactive game.

What are Arguments?

Argument: a reason or set of reasons given in support of a conclusion

Premise(s): the reason or set of reasons given to support an idea or course of action

Conclusion: the takeaway from the argument; what the person arguing wants you to believe

If the premises of an argument are true and the conclusion follows from the premises (the reasoning from the premises to conclusion isn’t faulty), then you have good reason to believe the conclusion.

Example Arguments

Premise 1: If it is raining, then the sidewalk is wet.

Premise 2: If the sidewalk is wet, then it is slippery.

Conclusion: If it is raining, then the sidewalk is slippery.

Premise 1: All dogs have paws.

Premise 2: All cats have paws.

Conclusion: All cats are dogs.

Premise 1: If I have covid, then I will have a fever.

Premise 2: I have a fever.

Conclusion: I have covid.

Premise 1: All judges should be just when deciding on sentences.

Premise 2: It is just to give harsh sentences for criminal behavior.

Conclusion: All judges should give harsh sentences for criminal behavior.

Premise 1: If you bully someone else, you’ll feel sad.

Premise 2: You shouldn’t do things that make you feel sad.

Conclusion: You shouldn’t bully other people.

What are Objections?

Objection(s): a reason or set of reasons given to show why an argument doesn’t work

Philosophers raise a number of different kinds of objections to different arguments. In the game, we’ll focus on a few central kinds of objections that you can raise:

* **Explain why a premise is false**
  + This objection requires that you pick a premise or premises and explain why they are false. In the above sample arguments, you might show that, for instance, the sidewalk isn’t always wet when raining because it’s a covered sidewalk.
* **Explain why the conclusion doesn’t follow from the premises**
  + This objection requires that you show some sort of flaw in the structure of reasoning, perhaps by pointing out a fallacy. In the above sample arguments, you might show that there’s a flaw in thinking that because two things share the same property, they are the same kind of thing.
* **Raise a counterexample**
  + This objection points to a case or example that pushes back against the conclusion. For example, you might recognize that a fever could also be a sign of something else like the flu or a bacterial infection. Maybe this person just has the flu, and that’s what explains the fever.
* **Point out a conflicting principle or value**
  + This objection is best targeted at arguments that focus too much on one value when other values also matter. In the case of whether judges should give harsh sentencing, you might ask whether justice is the only value here—what about mercy?
* **Argue that the conclusion is true but for different, more important reasons**
  + This objection is best used when the reasons given for a conclusion are flimsy or unrelated to the conclusion. For example, there are many other, more important reasons not to bully others besides your own sadness.

You can mix and match these objections depending on what the argument’s weaknesses are, and these do not necessarily exhaust the kinds of objections you can raise.

Game Rules

3-5 Players, Middle School Level or Above

Setup: There are two decks of cards: 12 *Objection* cards and 6 *Argument* cards. Assign one player the role of judge and the rest the role of objectors. The judge draws one of the *Argument* cards at random, and the objectors draw 3 *Objection* cards at random.

Rounds: Each round of the game has four phases.

1. The judge reads the *Argument* card aloud and places it in a location where all the objectors can see it. Objectors are invited to deliberate.
2. Going clockwise from the judge, each objector chooses an *Objection* card to play and explains how their objection works against the argument.
3. The judge decides which objection was the strongest and, crucially, explains why.
4. The winning objector receives a *Good Objection!* token.

New Rounds: At the end of each round, the role of judge rotates clockwise. A new argument is drawn at random, and the *Objection* cards are reshuffled and redistributed.

Win Condition: At the end of the game, the player(s) with the most *Good* *Objection!* tokens or tied with the most *Good Objection!* tokens win(s).

\*Arguments for this sample game modified from the following writing resource: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/fallacies/>

**Premise 1:** Guns are like hammers—they’re metal tools that could be used to kill someone.

**Premise 2:** It would be ridiculous to restrict the purchase of hammers.

**Conclusion:** So restrictions on purchasing guns are equally ridiculous.

**Premise 1:** Either we tear down the outdated building or we risk student safety.

**Premise 2:** We shouldn’t risk anyone’s safety.

**Conclusion:** We should tear down the outdated building after the semester ends.

**Premise 1:** The seriousness of a punishment should match the seriousness of the crime.

**Premise 2:** Right now, the punishment for drunk driving is just a fine. But drunk driving is a very serious crime that can kill innocent people.

**Conclusion:** So the death penalty should be the punishment for drunk driving.

**Premise 1:** Charity is the most important virtue.

**Premise 2:** We should use all the resources we can to develop virtue.

**Conclusion:** You should give as much money as you possibly can to charity.

**Premise 1:** Animal experimentation reduces our respect for life.

**Premise 2:** If we don’t respect life, we are likely to be more and more tolerant of violent acts like war and murder.

**Conclusion:** To prevent this terrible consequence, we should make animal experimentation illegal right now.

**Premise 1:** Philosophy exams are graded based on how well you understand the material.

**Premise 2:** But some students have grandparents die or experience health issues, which gives them an unfair disadvantage for understanding the material.

**Conclusion:** All philosophy students should get As on their exams.

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