

BridgeBuilders Discussion Group Proposal

Jake Shufro - Staples Class 26

Proposal

Hold monthly BridgeBuilders discussions at the Library as part of the Y's Men or Common Ground Initiative. To be moderated by BridgeBuilders and community member(s). The monthly meeting can be added to the Y's Men or main library calendar and [Common Ground sub-page](#).

Background

In recent years, American politics have become increasingly polarized, and it is affecting my generation. Recent events like the 2024 presidential election and the College Hamas protests have opened my eyes to our society's bitter divide and the intolerance to hear and understand opposing views. As a Staples student, I have witnessed this division in my peers around me and I fear that students will not have the necessary civil discourse skills going into college. I have established BridgeBuilders Club at Staples with the sponsorship of Mrs. Kammerman and have committed to having monthly discussions.

BridgeBuilders History & Methodology

BridgeBuilders primary goal is to help bridge divides - not by papering over those divides but by helping high school students have "better arguments." In this sense, arguments don't drive us apart. It helps students cultivate a love of and the skills for listening and communicating across differences.

BridgeBuilders has been influenced by the Project on Civil Dialogue (American University), The Better Arguments Project and BridgeUSA. We were founded as an official BridgeUSA Staples chapter but changed our name in February 2025 when BridgeUSA pivoted to only support college chapters. We have been able to leverage much of BridgeUSA's resources and we maintain an informal dialogue with them.

We have two core values: First, dialogue is a skill that can be learned and must be practiced (and not a spectator sport). Second, expressive freedom is necessary for dialogue, but the real work is in collaborative inquiry, listening, and learning. To combat polarization and intolerance, BridgeBuilders seeks to promote compassionate, respectful, and constructive conversations on challenging issues.

Our mission is to have as many Westport high school students attend and learn from a BridgeBuilders discussion. By being exposed to the BridgeBuilders methodology, we aspire for these students to be better prepared for contentious issues after graduating high school.

Building a "Community Bridge": Common Ground Initiative

We aspire to hold monthly meetings with interested students. I want to pursue an opportunity for students to learn from experienced community members. Conducting our

meetings with the community would add diversity and help prepare the students for conversations we will face in college.

Meeting Details

- Proposed Name - Bridgebuilding with Students and the Community
- Quarterly Meeting
 - Dates
 - April 2025 (summer break)
 - September 2025 to May 2025
 - No cost
 - Proposed Discussion Group Blurb:
 - Help build a new generation of leaders who value empathy and constructive engagement. Join Westport High School students looking for your experience and guidance in difficult conversations about important issues. If you care about protecting ideological diversity, championing constructive solutions, and putting country over party, please join us! Monthly topics will be provided in advance for your review.
- Participants
 - Student Moderator - Jake Shufro (I have been trained by BridgeUSA)
 - Community Moderator - Tucker Mays
 - Common Ground Participant / Sponsor - tbd
 - Goal is 5-8 students & 5-10 adults
 - Students - Open to all Staples students and will be publicized. I will also work with SLOBS & SLOGS to get volunteers. A core group of 4-5 officers who will be at every meeting.
 - Listed in the monthly calendar
 - Is preregistration possible? Can Jake email participants the topic sheet and materials in advance?
- Meeting Agenda - 1 hour
 - BridgeBuilders Intro - 2 minutes (see below)
 - Introductions - 1 minutes
 - Topic Sheet Review - 5 minutes
 - Discussion - 35 minutes
 - Wrap-Up / Solutions / Advice / Brainstorm next topic - 5 minutes
- Ensuring Discussion Flow - “Talking Ball” technique
- Future Topics
 - Should there be a compulsory draft?

- What makes you successful - student pressure, what you do in school, what you do in college.
- Should phones be banned from school?

Service League of Boys (SLOBS)



Liaisons and Volunteers

Philanthropies

Meeting Dates

Executive Board

Philanthropies

SLOBS works with over 60 organizations. Our goal is to promote charitable endeavors that foster community responsibility. Some of the organizations that we work with include the following.

Questions? Email philanthropy@shsslobs.com

EXAMPLE Topic Sheet: The TikTok Ban Debate

Background: TikTok, a social media platform owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, has faced scrutiny in the United States over national security concerns. Critics argue that the app could allow the Chinese government to access U.S. users' data, posing a security threat. Supporters of TikTok highlight its role in entertainment, education, and as a business platform for many Americans.

Recent Developments:

- **Legislative Actions:** In April 2024, Congress passed a law requiring ByteDance to divest from TikTok's U.S. operations by January 19, 2025, or face a ban. This legislation received bipartisan support, reflecting widespread concerns about data security and foreign influence. [Business Insider](#)
- **Legal Challenges:** TikTok has contested the divestment order in court, arguing that it violates the First Amendment and lacks sufficient evidence of a security threat. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments on January 10, 2025, with a decision expected before the January 19 deadline. [WSJ](#)
- **Executive Intervention:** President-elect Donald Trump has requested the Supreme Court to delay the ban, advocating for a negotiated resolution that addresses security concerns without shutting down the platform. This marks a shift from his earlier stance during his previous term, where he sought to ban TikTok outright. [Politico](#)

Public Opinion:

- **Support for Ban:** Public support for a TikTok ban has declined over time. In a summer 2024 survey, 32% of U.S. adults supported a government ban on TikTok, down from 50% in March 2023. Among teenagers, support is even lower, with only 18% favoring a ban. [Pew Research Center](#)
- **Usage Statistics:** TikTok boasts over 170 million American users, including many small businesses and content creators who rely on the platform for income and engagement. A ban could significantly impact these users economically and socially. [AP News](#)

Arguments For the Ban:

- **National Security:** Proponents argue that TikTok's Chinese ownership poses a risk of data being accessed by the Chinese government, potentially compromising U.S. national security. [Business Insider](#)

- **Data Privacy:** Concerns about the app's data collection practices and the potential misuse of personal information have been central to the call for a ban. [Britannica](#)

Arguments Against the Ban:

- **Freedom of Expression:** Opponents contend that banning TikTok infringes on free speech rights and sets a precedent for government overreach in regulating online platforms. [Reuters](#)
- **Economic Impact:** Many small businesses and creators depend on TikTok for marketing and revenue. A ban could lead to significant financial losses and disrupt livelihoods. [AP News](#)

Conclusion: The debate over banning TikTok in the United States encompasses complex issues of national security, data privacy, economic impact, and freedom of expression. As legal and political proceedings continue, stakeholders from various sectors are actively engaging in discussions to determine the app's future in the country.

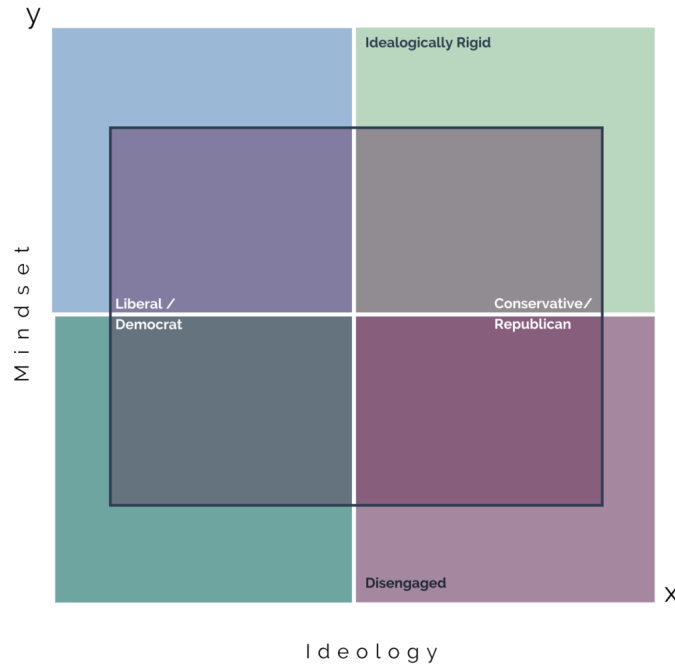
Recent Developments in the TikTok Ban

[Trump Asks Supreme Court to Pause TikTok Shutdown - WSJ](#)

[Small businesses brace themselves for potentially disruptive TikTok ban - AP News](#)

[Trump asks Supreme Court to delay TikTok law - Politico](#)

Welcome to BridgeBuilders



We believe that American civic life doesn't need fewer arguments; it just needs to do them better. Our mindset should be:

- Engaged Environment: Foster an environment of engagement & learning
- Constructive Dialogue: Improve the quality of politics
- Viewpoint Diversity: Learn from each other's perspectives

This is not the debate club where there is a winner/loser. This is about understanding the **Temperment Scale** where you can hold strong beliefs but express them in a constructive manner. An individual can be anywhere along the ideological spectrum (x axis), but whether they are willing to engage with other ideas and individuals (y-axis) is the test of our work as an organization.

Agenda

- BridgeBuilders Intro & Introductions - 5 minutes
- Topic Sheet Review - 5 minutes
- Discussion - 35 minutes
- Wrap-Up / Solutions / Advice / Brainstorm next topic - 5 minutes

Norms of Discussion

- 1. Listen to listen, rather than listen to respond**
- 2. Try not to interrupt or have side conversations**
- 3. Address the statement, not the person**
- 4. Participants represent only themselves, not social groups**

3 Dimensions of Arguing

HISTORY

Today's civic arguments are rooted in a historical context. Remember, arguments—being able to reckon with differences and forge joint paths forward—are critical to a healthy American civic life. Today's civic and political debates are rooted in our history, and many of them can be boiled down to a finite number fundamentally American tensions such as liberty versus equality that require constant negotiation.

EMOTION

A Better Argument is one in which all participants use emotional intelligence. This means that each party must seek to understand why the other party is taking a certain stance—rather than negating that party's point of view. Each side must step up to take responsibility for its own piece of the issue to create a new, more productive cycle.

POWER

A Better Argument requires being honest about power. In many spaces of civil discourse, participants do not enter as equals; they enter reckoning with imbalances. These inherited inequalities need to be named before a Better Argument can take place. An important part of the Better Arguments process will be to account for these realities.

5 Principles to a Better Argument



1. **TAKE WINNING OFF THE TABLE** - Conventionally, parties enter an argument with a goal of winning—or at least reaching resolution. Instead, the goal of a Better Argument should be framed as reaching deeper insights, developing more nuanced understanding, and relying less on assumptions.
2. **PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS AND LISTEN PASSIONATELY** - A Better Argument foregrounds relationship and requires that all parties are truly listening to one another. Participants should listen to learn, not to win.
3. **PAY ATTENTION TO CONTEXT** - A Better Argument acknowledges the complex realities surrounding any debate, including cultural context. Understanding these realities makes an argument more accessible. Any Better Argument should begin with specific questions that help establish a shared understanding of the context in which participants are entering the conversation.
4. **EMBRACE VULNERABILITY** - In civic life today, many Americans engage only with circles that confirm their own worldviews. One major reason why this withdrawal occurs is because entering a space of argument means making yourself vulnerable. At the Better Arguments Project, we commend your willingness to take this risk, and we believe that when one person takes the leap, others will follow.
5. **MAKE ROOM TO TRANSFORM** - A Better Argument is a transformational experience for all involved. Because it does not aim to win or reach resolution, the goal of a Better Argument becomes simply about changing how we engage with one another in order to build a community.