NEWSHOUR EXTRA A NewsHour with Jim Lehrer special for students

Lesson Plan: The Presidential Debate Primer

Handout #3: Debate Tactics to Look Out For

Strong debate tactics

Candor and clarity in response to challenging questions
Direct clear description of policies with enough details that they can be understood by voters
An understanding of problems with depth and degree to address crucial challenges
Ability to 'think on their feet' instead of reciting 'talking points'
Empathy for viewpoints within the diverse groups in the electorate
Stirring metaphors appropriately linked to problems and solutions
Personal stories that demonstrate strong and appealing characteristics
Civility and respect for constituents and opponents
Authoritative leadership
Appropriate and warm humor
Developing a connection to the audience and moderator
Resilience and to withstand criticism
Grace under pressure

Weak or misleading debate tactics

Reciting talking points and rhetoric without direct links to the debate question
Inflammatory examples
Red Herring tactic: presenting an irrelevant issue to draw attention from the pertinent topic
Straw Man tactic: presenting a deliberate distortion the opponent's view so that it can be easily refuted, but the actual position of the candidate is not discussed or refuted
Innuendo and suggestion about character faults of the opponent without facts or examples
Personal attacks without substance or merit
Clichés and platitudes
Misstatements and misrepresentations
Generalities when specifics are important in decision-making
Derisive or mocking humor