Crash Debates

1. No preparation is needed for students to engage in a crash debate, so it is a great way to introduce a topic to get students to engage in pre-thinking and to find out what prior knowledge your students have before you begin a new topic.
2. To conduct a crash debate, choose a topic your students have not yet studied and frame one aspect of the topic in the form of a two-sided question. For this example, I will use the debate question, "Is this a living thing?" to introduce the properties of life on the first day of biology.
3. Gather any props or visuals you may need. For this example, I might gather some interesting things that are living organisms (a dried bean, an insect, yeast rehydrated in warm water with sugar) and some things that appear to be living organisms but are in fact not (a cell phone, a lit candle, a mixture of vinegar and baking soda).
4. Divide the class into 3-person teams and place one item at each table so each 3-person group has a different item upon about which they are answering the question (do not comment or reveal whether or not these items are in fact alive or not).
5. **Randomly** assign a role to each team member: one Judge, one "Pro/Yes" point of view, one "Con/No" point of view. If the class is not divisible by three, create a few 4-person teams where there are two students playing the role of the judge.
6. Tell the students the Pro/Yes and Con/No students they will engage in a debate where they take turns speaking. They must support the position they have been randomly assigned regardless of their personal opinion. Each side, Pro or Con, will have 30 seconds to present an argument that supports their position and then the opposite side (Pro or Con) will have 30 seconds to respond to the argument presented.
7. The judge must act as a non-biased official who dictates the time constraints and determines the winner of the debate. You may require the judge to keep notes on each point as it is argued so they have documentation that substantiates the basis of their final decision (see the student handout that follows).
8. Ask the Pro and Con students in each 3-person group to choose one side of a coin. Flip a coin for the class. The winner of the coin toss in each group will speak first.
9. The students playing the role of the Pro and Con positions will continue taking turns speaking to support their side of the argument using 30 seconds at a time to make their case (they may say, "I rest" if they conclude prior to the end of their 30 second time limit). Each 3-person team should continue until a total time of 5 minutes has been reached or until both sides exhaust their arguments and neither side has elected to say more.
10. After the debates are concluded the must judge declare a winner and defended their decision. Encourage the judge to include feedback on points made in the verbal argument and compelling aspects of the nonverbal communication. Ask the debaters to thank their judge for the feedback.
11. Allow the students to then find a new 3-person group where they can play a different position (for example, each judge should play a Pro or Con role in their second 3-person group).
12. Place a new object in the center of the group such that no person in the group has discussed or been a judge for that item and repeat the debate procedure.
13. Keep changing the groups, roles, and items until the students have assembled some useful arguments and ideas (in this example, the students will gather a list of the properties of life as they hear one argument here and another argument there).
14. You may find the students have covered all the main points of the topic, or you may need to supplement their information. Regardless, you now have a launch point for your next topic that the students have already begun to explore.

Judge's Scorecard

Pro: _____   Judge:_____

Con: _____   Winner: _____

Round	Summary of Argument • What were the main topics? • How well did the topics apply to the debate? • Was the point unique?	Use of Citations or Sources • Was the evidence used supported? • Did they explain where evidence was found? • Did they use reputable sources?	Communication Skills • Did they speak clearly? • Did they use well-formed arguments and statements?
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Opening Statement (1 min) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Rebuttal (30 sec) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Retort (30 sec) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Opening Statement(1 min) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Rebuttal (30 sec) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
"Pro" / "Con" (*circle*) Retort (30 sec) Rating: (4 is highest)	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4