

# THE GENDER GAP IN OUR SCHOOLS

## Introduction

### Focus

This *News in Review* module examines the issue of the literacy gender gap and the history of women's achievements in Canada, including their fight to succeed in a co-educational learning environment.

### Definition

*Feminist* refers to an individual, male or female, who supports and advocates equality of the sexes.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

In the year 2003, boys are lagging behind girls in school, and this has many educators very concerned. For the first half of the 20th century it was not the norm to see women in colleges or universities in Canada. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s feminists fought hard to make public schools girl-friendly environments where they were given equal opportunities to learn and participate in school life. Between 1981 and 1991 there was a surge of women entering colleges and universities. Now in 2003, girls are outperforming boys in schools across Canada. This has led to even more of a shift in enrolment patterns at post-secondary schools. Women now make up more than 50 per cent of students in overall enrolment and in professional programs such as law and medicine. They are also making huge gains in engineering and the sciences, once almost exclusively male domains.

Experts say the reason for this large shift comes down mainly to reading. Federal and provincial test results suggest that girls today read more and with better comprehension than boys. The challenge for educators today is to engage boys in reading. There are a number of strategies and reading programs being implemented to help boys. One strategy is to increase the number of male role models in schools by

convincing more men to become teachers. Another recommends bringing in males from the community to read to boys. Experts have evidence that boys are in fact reading. However they are not reading what the curriculum offers. Boys spend their time reading Internet sites, trading cards, computer manuals, non-fiction, and comic books. Although these are not prescribed by the school curriculum, some experts suggest that the school system should redefine its definition of literacy and begin to value what boys are reading. Introducing these types of reading materials might create a better balance and give boys more of a chance at succeeding.

The effect of gender differences in brain development, which directly affect language development and literacy skills, is another theory put forth to explain why boys are behind. This theory suggests that boys and girls learn and develop language skills at a different pace. One recommendation to accommodate this difference in literacy skill development is the single-sex classroom that provides reading materials and pedagogical instruction particularly suited to boys' or girls' interests. Many questions still remain about the issue of boys and their lagging literacy skills. Women have come a long way in Canada, but are boys losing their way?

## Questions

1. Why do you think boys trail behind girls in reading? Explain fully.
2. How would you encourage better reading skills among boys?
3. Consider the students in your school. How do the reading interests and literacy rates among girls and boys compare with what is being described above?
4. What impact might these changes in reading habits and school success have on the future of males and females in Canada?

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## Video Review

Answer these questions as you view the video.

1. What was Marc Dowd's problem?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the Literacy Gender Gap?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Ten years ago girls were falling behind boys in science and mathematics.
  - a) Who decided to try to change this?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b) What actions did they take?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_ per cent of university students are men. \_\_\_\_ per cent of university graduates are men, and \_\_\_\_ per cent of university graduates are women.
5. What did Principal Trimble offer to students in grades seven and eight at C.B. Stirling Public School?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Boys are \_\_\_\_\_ years behind girls in their language development at ages 13 and 14.
7. What are some of the techniques Dave Thorne is using in his classroom that have affected boys' participation?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. According to the video, most teenage boys spend more than \_\_\_\_\_ hours a week on computer games and \_\_\_\_\_ hours a week watching television.
9. Heather Blair has changed her way of thinking about the definition of *literacy*.
  - a) Explain this change using specific examples.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Who does she believe is falling behind?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How does Marc's father convince him to go to the library to pick out books?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Explain why Marc became a reader.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## *Timeline: Canadian Women in Modern Times*

While women are enjoying great achievements in Canadian society today, the road to success has been long and difficult. Which of the listed events do you think is most important? Why?

### Further Research

The CBC Archives at [www.cbc.ca/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/archives) has excellent audio-visual resources on topics such as Equality First: The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and Barbara Frum: Pioneering Broadcaster.

**1902** The first Canadian degree course in Household Science is given at the University of Toronto.

**1903** Emma Baker is the first woman to receive a Ph.D. from a Canadian university. Marie Curie, co-discoverer of radium, becomes the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for Physics.

**1912** Carie Derick is the first woman in Canada to become a full professor, becoming a professor of Morphological Botany at McGill.

**1913** Alys McKey Bryant is the first woman to pilot an airplane in Canada.

**1915** Nurse Elizabeth Smellie is the first woman appointed Colonel in the Canadian Army, becoming head of the Canadian Army Nursing Corps.

**1916** Canadian women win the right to vote and hold political office in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

**1917** Roberta MacAdams and Louise McKinney are the first women elected to a provincial legislature, being elected to the Alberta Legislature on June 7.

**1918** Canadian women win the right to vote in federal elections.

**1920** E. Marjorie Hill, Canada's first woman architect, graduates from the University of Toronto (B.A.Sc.).

**1921** Agnes Macphail is the first woman elected as a member of Parliament in Canada.

**1929** The British Privy Council declares Canadian women to be "persons" under law.

**1930** Cairine Wilson is the first woman appointed to the Canadian Senate.

**1939-45** Canadian women join traditionally male fields of employment in record numbers during the Second World War.

**1940** Women win the right to vote in Quebec.

**1951** The first woman to become mayor of a major city is Charlotte Whitton, the mayor of Ottawa.

**1957** Ellen Fairclough is the first woman to become a federal cabinet minister, being sworn in as Secretary of State in the Conservative government.

**1971** Amendments to the Canadian Labour Code include: prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex and marital status, strong reinforcement of the principle of equal pay for equal work, and the provision of 17 weeks of maternity leave.

**1980** Jeanne Sauvé is the first female Speaker of the House of Commons.

**1981** Women's rights, ensuring equality before and under the law, are enshrined in the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**1982** Women in Canada earn on average 59 per cent of what men earn. Madame Justice Bertha Wilson is the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

**1989** Heather Erxleben became Canada's first female combat soldier.

**1991** Rita Johnson becomes the first female provincial premier in Canada. Manon Rheaume becomes first woman to play for a major junior hockey team. Louise Fréchette is the first female Canadian ambassador to the United Nations.

**1992** Roberta Bondar is the first female Canadian astronaut in space.

**1993** Kim Campbell is the first female prime minister of Canada.

**1999** First female Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Beverly McLachlin, is appointed.

Summarized from:

Coomber, J. & Evans, R. *Women Changing Canada*. Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Timeline of Canadian Women's History, [www.stfx.ca/people/Inforestel/308website/omen'shistory/timeline.html](http://www.stfx.ca/people/Inforestel/308website/omen'shistory/timeline.html)

## Analysis

1. What is your opinion about this timeline? What surprises you? What did you already know?
2. Men have been graduating from universities, and participating in politics, sports, and the workforce for hundreds of years. Why do you think it has taken women so long to achieve these experiences? Explain your answer in a paragraph.
3. Using the timeline give examples of the most important gains in legal, political, and social equality Canadian women have experienced in the past century.
4. How would you compare the roles of Canadian women today with women 50 and 100 years ago? Have women achieved equality with men? Explain your answer.
5. Choose one woman mentioned in the timeline and develop three questions you would ask her.

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## Stats Scan

Over the past 80 years the number of women enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Canada has steadily increased. Today, Canadian women make up more than half of the population enrolled in universities and colleges. In 1921, only 16 per cent of university students were women. In 1969, 36 per cent; by 1981, 47 per cent. In 1991, fully 54 per cent of university

students were women. By the early 1980s Canadian women were starting to enter the fields of business, engineering, medicine and law in greater numbers. The number of Canadian women with a degree soared by more than half a million from 1981 to 1991—to nearly 1.1 million—and, since 1994, more women than men have been enrolled in Canadian universities and colleges.

**Chart 1: University Enrolment**

	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999
<b>Males</b>	270 069	265 436	263 904	260 436	260 901
<b>Females</b>	305 644	307 758	309 731	312 663	319 475

**Chart 2: College Enrolment**

	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999
<b>Males</b>	178 773	182 910	185 653	185 495	186 787
<b>Females</b>	201 188	208 372	211 655	213 148	216 729

Not only has women's enrolment increased at the undergraduate level in universities, but it has also increased at the graduate level. In 1970 women made up only 9 per cent of students in

doctorate programs. Study the table below to learn how many women are enrolled at the graduate level and how many women make up each field of study at the university level.

**Chart 3: Women as a Percentage of University Enrolment, by Level and Field of Study, 1997-98**

<b>Field of Study</b>	<b>Bachelor's</b>	<b>Master's</b>	<b>Doctorate</b>	<b>Total</b>
		<b>%</b>		
Education	69.5	69.7	66.3	69.4
Fine/Applied Arts	63.4	61.4	58.6	63.2
Humanities	62.2	57.7	50.0	60.8
Social Sciences	57.4	50.7	51.6	56.6
Agriculture/Biological Sciences	63.5	55.6	40.1	61.8
Engineering/Applied Sciences	21.5	25.2	15.6	21.5
Health professions	70.8	62.4	47.4	66.1
Math/Physical Sciences	29.7	32.7	23.4	29.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>54.8</b>

**Did you know . . .**

In 1999 Canada spent more money on education on a percentage basis than any other member of the G7 (seven most industrialized nations in the world)? Canada also had the largest proportion of the population with college or university qualifications.

Since 1994 more women than men have been enrolled in college programs. Review the table below to learn the

percentage of women in each field of study at the college level.

**Chart 4: Community College Enrolment of Women, by Field of Study, 1997-98**

Field of Study	Women as a % of Total in Field
Fine/Applied Arts	56.1
Arts/Sciences	52.4
Secretarial Science	93.1
Other Business/Commerce	54.6
Mathematics/Computer Science	24.4
Engineering and Other Technologies	14.7
Nursing	86.2
Other Health Sciences	77.6
Humanities	67.6
Natural Sciences/Primary Industries	40.9
Educational and Counselling Services	91.3
Other Social Sciences/Services	70.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>

All statistics adapted from Statistics Canada's Web site and *Women in Canada 2000: A Gender Based Statistical Report* (catalogue no. 89-503-XPE).

### To Consider

1. Why do you think Canadian women in the 1980s began to enter non-traditional fields of study and why did the numbers of women enrolled in university soar from half a million to over a million?

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2. From 1921 to 1991 how much has the percentage of women enrolled in university grown? \_\_\_\_\_ per cent

### Chart 1 and 2

3. In 1998-99, how many more females than males were enrolled in university?

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4. In 1998-99, how many more females than males were enrolled in college?

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### Chart 3

5. How much has the percentage of women enrolled in graduate programs grown from 1970 to 1998? \_\_\_\_\_ per cent

6. At what level of university studies are women still falling behind?

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7. The two fields of study with the highest female enrolment are

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8. The two fields of study that have the lowest female enrolment are

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

**Chart 4**

9. Name the two fields of study that have the highest female enrolment.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

10. Name the two fields of study that have the lowest female enrolment.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

11. In a paragraph use your opinion to explain the enrolment numbers and corresponding fields of study for both chart 3 and 4.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Overall, did universities or colleges have more female than male enrolment by 1998?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion**

13. Were you surprised by the numbers in charts 1- 4 ? Explain your response carefully and completely.

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## Crossfire

These quotes are from Canadian men and women commenting on the achievements or status of women in Canada over the past century. Which quote do you think is most significant? Why?

### Further Research

Consider visiting the CBC Archives at [www.cbc.ca/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/archives) to view the audio-visual file *On Every Front: Canadian Women in the Second World War*.

### Quote

In spite of the very real progress made by women around the world, the U.N. recently declared that “Violence against women has become as much a pandemic as HIV/AIDS or malaria.”  
— Noeleen Heyzer, *Toronto Star*, November 24, 2003

1. Nellie McClung, a political activist, was quoted in *Maclean's* magazine in 1915: “I wish you could see the proportion of my mail that tells me to go home and darn my husband’s socks. I never would have believed that one man’s hosiery could excite the amount of interest those socks do—and yet, do you know, they are always darned!”

2. A French Canadian priest, in 1918, expressed his opinion on the idea of women teaching, organizing charities, or getting involved in social work: “Equality, whatever it is before God, in no way implies the parity of roles in society. One forgets that woman, by her sex, by her physical structure and her moral qualities, by her tastes, talents, and tendencies, absolutely differs from man, and that this radical difference between the sexes results in no less a difference in their duties.”

3. After the First World War most Canadian women were removed from their jobs. Women who remained employed were severely underpaid and often had to turn to prostitution as a second income. An observer in Hamilton, Ontario, said: “And they are all working girls! Here was the dressmaker’s apprentice who could not live on nothing a week, there the worker in the jam factory who was out of work for three months and had to find her bread on the street. . . . Clerks, secretaries, barmaids, factory hands, servants, laundry workers, and every trade was represented in which women are over-worked and exploited.”

4. Again, after the Second World War Canadian women were removed from

their jobs. A female reporter wrote: “We made munitions, served overseas or at home, whenever we were needed. We loved doing it. Then what happened when the war was over? We were patted on the head and told, ‘Good show, girls, but now back to *kinder, kuche* and *kirche* (kids, kitchen and church). . . .’ If married women are people in emergencies, why can’t they be people when there isn’t an emergency?”

5. In the 1940s Canadian economist and humourist Stephen Leacock expressed his opposition to women’s suffrage: “Social policy should proceed from the fundamental truth that women are and must be dependent. If they cannot be looked after by an individual they must be looked after by the state. To expect a woman, for example, if left by the death of her husband with young children without support, to maintain herself by her own efforts, is the most absurd mockery of freedom ever devised.”

6. When asked about Canadian women in politics, Charlotte Whitton, mayor of Ottawa and first female mayor in Canada in 1951 said: “Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.”

7. A member of the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children speaking in Toronto in 1988 said: “Violence against women today is part of a continuum of sexist power relationships which continue to define our roles in the home, workplace, and society. Inequality, poverty, and alienation spawn further

violence and make women more fearful . . . which in turn causes them to limit their right to participate fully in city life.”

8. Jan Coomber and Rosemary Evans wrote in a book titled *Women Changing Canada* in 1997: “Today, options for women are broader than they have been at any other time in history. The Victorian ideal that restricted women to a

domestic role and placed them on a pedestal has been shattered. The remarkable gains achieved in the past century have moved women out of the parlour and pantry and into positions of power and influence throughout society. No longer viewed as delicate and feeble creatures in need of protection, women today are recognized as independent persons who are capable of the best and the worst humanity has to offer.”

## Questions

- List the typical jobs available for women shortly after the First World War.
  - Do “typically female” jobs still exist today? Explain your answer using specific examples.
- Why were most women removed from their jobs after the First and Second World wars?
  - Do you think this was fair? Why or why not?
  - Do you believe women who worked during the war years proved to men that they were capable people, not merely females? Explain your answer.
- According to the quotes, what was a woman’s role in society in the early part of the 20th century?
  - According to the quotes, what has a woman’s role in society become in the latter half of the 20th century?

## Discussion

- Identify the quotes that show evidence of society’s resistance to equality for women.
  - In your opinion why would this resistance exist?
- Which quote do you agree with more, quote number 7 or quote number 8? Explain your choice.
- Write your own quote about Canadian women’s achievement and/or status in 2003. Explain your quote in two or three sentences.

## Extension

In a paragraph explain how Canada would be similar and/or different today if Canadian women had achieved equality one century ago?

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## *Helping Boys Read*

### Definition

*Lad culture* is a colloquial term that suggests boys are more hyperactive, aggressive, and less responsible than girls.

A Canada-wide evaluation of students' language skills reaffirms a trend that previous studies have shown. Girls are scoring higher on literacy tests than boys. Provincially and federally the results are the same: boys continue to lag behind girls in reading and writing in most parts of Canada. Evidence also highlights the facts that boys are also more likely to be in slow-learner programs, diagnosed with behavioural problems, and dropping out of high school.

### Why Aren't Boys Reading?

- Research suggests many reasons for boys' low reading scores and their falling behind in school in general. Scientists believe that brain differences lead to a difference in their rates of language development. By 13 years of age a girl's language skills are more developed than those of a boy.
- Some researchers today are blaming feminists. In the 1980s it was brought to the nation's attention that girls' scores were lower than boys'. Feminists and educators fought hard to change school environments across the country to make better places for girls to learn. As a result, girls have not only caught up to boys, but they are now surpassing them in all areas. Some parents and educators are beginning to fight for a reassessment of the learning environment and are insisting that more attention be paid to the boys' alarmingly low test scores and reading abilities.
- Lad culture, short attention spans, and lack of maturity are also being blamed when boys fall behind in school. Some teachers claim that boys are more prepared to "wing it" when completing assignments and exams. Boys are

said to be risk-takers, but the current system rewards those who study and work hard for long periods of time.

- In recent years, educators, publishers, and literacy experts have gained a greater understanding of what kind of reading boys enjoy. The fact that conventional curriculum is focused mostly on classic fiction leaves out what most young boys are reading. While boys are less interested in fiction than girls, they are voraciously reading magazines, newspapers, non-fiction books, trading cards, computer game manuals, and the Internet.
- Finally, there seems to be a concern on the part of some teachers that male role models, fathers, uncles, and older brothers, are not reading. If these men were reading, as well as discussing reading with young boys, perhaps more boys would see the pleasure and value in reading and become better readers.

### How Can We Get Boys Reading?

There is no shortage of ideas on how to get boys reading. Programs, teaching strategies, and new ways of defining literacy are being studied and applied to help boys who are falling behind. North American schools have been looking to some schools in Jamaica where they have invited male role models, specifically fathers and uncles, into their schools to read to young boys. Building links with parents and other adults in the community has proved to be successful in encouraging boys to read and teaching them to value education. A similar program exists in New Brunswick, where hockey players are brought into the elementary schools to read with boys to demonstrate that even "macho" men read. More male teachers

**Did you know . . .**

On November 25, 2003, the Canadian Education Statistics Council released a report suggesting that boys were at a disadvantage to girls when entering school? Their research claimed that 79 per cent of girls read daily compared with 64 per cent of boys, even before they entered the school system.

at the elementary level may also make a difference.

Allowing boys to read books other than the fiction classics that schools tend to emphasize could change the way educators interpret boys' literacy skills. Studies have shown that boys are interested in reading humour, horror, thrillers, sport biographies, books about space, science, jokes, vehicles, and comic books, trading cards, and Web pages. The use of popular culture to help students learn is a trend that is being welcomed by some educators, while others claim it is devaluing education. Perhaps boys are not as illiterate as they are made out to be; they are just literate in what interests them.

There is an ongoing debate about the most effective reading strategies used in the classroom. Many schools in Canada are employing a "balanced literacy" program. Balanced literacy blends the best of "whole language" and "phonics" instruction with the belief that neither is completely effective without the other. A balanced literacy program includes "read alouds" and modeled writing, shared reading and writing, guided

reading and writing, and independent reading and writing. One successful reading program in Canadian schools is called Reading Recovery. This program requires a one-to-one teaching ratio for 40-minute periods at a time. It is intense and usually used with at-risk students in kindergarten or grade one. The First Steps reading program complements Reading Recovery. First Steps is being implemented for readers in grade two or higher.

Other strategies to get boys reading include: having boys sit next to girls in class so they will behave and begin to read more; allowing boys to act out what they have read instead of having to write about it because this gives them a chance to be their genetically programmed active selves; and holding read-a-thons in schools so that an element of competition is associated with reading, and boys are naturally more competitive.

Reading scores have shown that boys with access to books from an early age have higher literacy scores, as do boys who do not have part-time jobs after school.

## Questions

1. What are provincial and federal studies indicating about boys' and girls' success rates in school?
2. How long ago did the push begin to help girls improve in school?
3. a) List and explain five theories why boys are falling behind at school.  
b) Choose one theory you agree with and one theory you disagree with and explain your reasoning.
4. List and explain three strategies or programs designed to help boys improve their literacy skills.
5. Choose one strategy or program that you think will be most effective and explain your reasoning.
6. In a paragraph explain how you would compare or contrast your own experiences in school with the information in this reading.
7. What programs exist in your school to help students (male or female) improve their reading skills?

# THE GENDER GAP IN OUR SCHOOLS

## *Great Debate: The Single-sex Classroom*

Teachers may use this section by organizing a full-class formal debate or holding more freewheeling debates in groups of five or six. It might even be useful to have students discuss the issue in pairs. An evaluation rubric is provided.

Boys are lagging behind girls in school. Their reading skills are significantly lower, and this fact has alerted parents and educators alike. Theories of cause are being scrutinized, and programs to increase boys' literacy rates are being implemented. One option being explored is to move to single-sex classrooms. Investigate the evidence for yourself before you decide whether this is a viable solution to the problem.

### **Pro**

- “Hormonal” boys and girls will not distract each other.
- Curriculum can be tailored to boys' and girls' different learning styles and rates of language development.
- Students will be able to break free of stereotypes and feel freer to pursue interests they normally would not pursue.
- Bullying will be reduced because boys will not be acting out to impress girls.
- Both sexes will participate more in class because they are not in fear of being “put down” by peers of the opposite sex.
- Both sexes benefit equally from single-sex classrooms.

### **Con**

- Students will not learn how to cope in a co-ed world.
- This will set back the cause of gender equity.
- Traditional stereotypes will be unintentionally reinforced.
- Research does not prove that academic progress improves only because of single-sex classrooms.

- Academic competition between the sexes will be discouraged.
- This will encourage the sexes to separate their social and intellectual lives where the interactions between the sexes become primarily romantic, not collegial.

### **Preparing for the Debate**

1. Carefully review the information provided.
2. Take a pro or con position on the issue of “single-sex classrooms.”
3. Brainstorm with others for further arguments to support your position.
4. Conduct further research using the Internet, your school library, and your public library.
5. Develop your arguments by gathering evidence, quotes, facts, and statistics.

### **Debate Protocol**

1. ‘Pro’ builds case (uninterrupted) to present their position.
2. ‘Con’ builds case (uninterrupted) to present their position.
3. Both sides get two minutes to confer and prepare for rebuttal.
4. ‘Con’ given two-minute maximum for rebuttal.
5. ‘Pro’ given two-minute maximum for rebuttal.
6. Option: questions can be taken from the audience.

Debate Criteria	Debate Evaluation			
	Levels of Performance for Each Criterion			
	4	3	2	1
Debate Clarity: clear and consistent viewpoint in the introduction, body, rebuttal, and the conclusion	Completely clear in all parts	Mostly clear in all parts	Clear in some but not other parts	Unclear in most parts
Use of Arguments: clear explanation of a large number of arguments that are relevant to the topic	Large number of relevant arguments	Many relevant arguments	Some relevant arguments	Few or no relevant arguments
Use of Rebuttal: development of original and effective counter-arguments to show weaknesses in the other side's position	Numerous effective counter-arguments	Many effective counter-arguments	Some effective counter-arguments	Few or no effective counter-arguments
Organization of Debate: use of a logically developed set of arguments by the team with loose ends tied up at the conclusion	All arguments were set out in an organized manner	Arguments were mostly presented in an organized manner	Some organization of arguments was evident	Confused set of arguments
Presentation of Debate: demonstration of enthusiasm, poise, and audience connection	All of the features were demonstrated	At least two of the features were demonstrated	At least one of the features was demonstrated	None of these features was demonstrated

### Debate Personal Reflection

1. In a paragraph explain how this debate added to your understanding of the topic. Use specific examples in your explanation and be sure to identify whether or not you support single-sex classrooms.
2. Explain what skills you would like to improve for your next debate.