



Collegiate, Public & Private School Speech & Debate Coach, Joie Rasberry, Shares Her Passion for the Subject Matter

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If our lives and our thoughts and our values are to be socially constructed, then let it at least be constructed with meaning. Let's refer to this as Speech & Debate 101.

As a former collegiate speaker & debater, I learned quickly that debating is a word endowed with a social stamp of approval, an affirmation of sorts, and if you and I are engaged in it, we are engaging in something rigorous, thoughtful, and intellectually challenging.

Try having a conversation with some of the so-called greatest thought leaders of the world today and you'll see how the parameters of what debate is has been negotiated, twisted, and compromised.

There are far too many who are passive. Far too many who go along just to get along. Far too many who allow others to think for them. Far too many who can't defend and uphold their own ideas. Far too many who have not researched and done their homework. Far too many who don't know when to speak, what to say, and when it is a best practice not to say anything at all.

We have to be able to risk conflict and confrontation. We must be willing to at least listen to new ideas, even if it flies in the face of our own convictions.

When training in Speech & Debate, I learned about engagement and consensus, but I also learned about adversaries. My partner and I were expected to attack our opponents. We were compelled to take a position and defend it. It required us to deconstruct arguments, but we also had to build on ideas. In debating, we learned to draw clear and distinct lines in the sand between us and our opponents. It was sort of like an intellectual sport.

Then in the end, we had to cross and shake hands. This was the civilized clincher. It was always a very defining moment. And thus it was this kind of respect for public discourse that changed the course of my life.

Media Mogul Oprah Winfrey, Former President Bill Clinton, and the late U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan all had something in common. They were all members of grade school and collegiate Speech & Debate teams.

Students need more than rap music, expensive tennis shoes, name brand clothing, and cell phones in order to compete in this global competitive market. They must be prepared on every level to earn their seat at the bargaining table. So as we test ideas and policies, let's make sure the world is geared with those who are able to lead, and if not lead, at least light a candle where it needs to be lit along the way. There are no individuals better able to carry out this mission than students.