

# Idea Dialogues Topic Plan 2019

TEDxYouth@Columbia Ambassadors and Student Leaders—welcome to TEDxYouth@Columbia Idea Dialogues! Included, you will find a topic plan with a week-by-week breakdown of topics. Through participating in this program, we hope to establish a space for students that promotes reasoned, logical, and respectful dialogue within schools in South Carolina.

## Idea Dialogues Guidelines

### Why?

Before you begin doing any of this, it's important to understand why. People don't have the skills to talk about important, controversial issues in constructive and productive ways. Frequently, different perspectives result in argument or debate, which then leads to all sorts of conflict.

- In a **debate**, which happens between **opponents**, each assumes that their perspective is true, and attacks the others', in order to prove themselves right.
- In a **discussion**, between **participants**, ideas are discussed, but no end goal is set or reached.
- In a **dialogue**, between **people**, each person attempts to first listen before speaking. They search for strength in all positions, and understand that everyone holds their beliefs for different reasons.

This is why we use the word “dialogue” throughout—and we encourage you to, too!

### Before you begin:

- Make sure that the technology needed to host an Idea Dialogues session is available, set-up, and functional before each session. Confirm this with your Ambassador.
- Watch the TED Talks assigned for that week.
- Make sure to turn off annotations for each video before watching. While watching:
  - Pause the talks at key points. These could be interesting quotes that somehow relate to the questions, or were just plain interesting. Note the timestamps so you can highlight them during your Dialogue.
  - Consider how the ideas relate to your school, neighborhood, community, city, region, state, country, and world.
- Plan that week's Idea Dialogue session with your other Student Leader.
- **Important:** Only spend about **one third** of the Idea Dialogues session watching TED Talks. Use the rest of the time to facilitate a meaningful dialogue about the topic. If this

means you cannot watch all TED Talks, that is completely okay. Choose the TED Talks you think will resonate most within your school community.

## Using Dialogue Questions and Activations:

- Each Student Leader has access to the Idea Dialogues Topic Plan. This document contains topics for every week up until the conference date.
  - Each topic contains a set of TED Talks, Dialogue Questions, and one or two Activations (ways for students to take practical action regarding the topic).
  - Use these dialogue questions to guide the session.
  - Then, discuss the activations for each topic. Encourage students to act on one of these activations after every Idea Dialogues session.
- Based on the key moments that you picked from the TED Talks, write a few questions that link those moments to the Dialogue.
- A good question is **both answerable and challenging**.
- Here are some types of questions that are good for dialogues:
  - Analysis:
    - “Why?” “How would you explain...” “What is the importance of...” “What is the meaning of...”
  - Compare and Contrast:
    - “Compare...” “Contrast...” “What is the difference between...” “What is the similarity between...” “Would this work in our community / time?”
  - Cause and Effect:
    - “What are the causes/results of...” “What connection is there between...”
  - Clarification:
    - “What does the speaker mean by...” “Explain how...”

## Right before you begin:

- Arrange the room to maximize student-to-student eye contact. You can move desks into the shape of a circle.
- Ensure that you have set up a projector screen or other system for playing the TED Talks.
- Ensure that you have prepared on your computer:
  - The TED Talk (pick one to watch with the whole group)
  - any additional resources (such as maps or websites that may be helpful in exploring the topic) in other open tabs in your browser

- **We recommend that Ambassadors or teachers not sit in on Idea Dialogue sessions.** This will maximize students' comfort and allow students to have real, raw conversations.
  - The one exception to the rule above is to, optionally, have your principal sit in on an Idea Dialogues session. Much of the support that we receive for our program at your school comes from your administration. At the same time, we value students' ability to have conversation. Make sure to check with participants to see if they are comfortable with your principal attending a session.

## When you begin:

- Ask everyone to introduce each other.
  - Do this in a fun way.
  - Be mindful of what factors of a person's introduction might make them feel judged and less willing to participate, like stating their grade.
- Provide clear guidelines for participation. Discuss them beforehand, stick to them, and enforce them during the dialogue.
- Give students a few minutes to gather their thoughts of the topic on paper.

## Create a dialogue-friendly climate:

- Introduce the topic for that week. Make sure you say, "Today's topic is ..."
- Introduce the ideas of values-based vs. evidence-based debating.
  - Values are deeply-rooted beliefs that are subjective and subject to interpretation.
  - Evidence is objective and fact-based.
  - Differences in values are inevitable, and disputes will happen.
  - These should be resolved by appealing to objective evidence.

## During the dialogue:

- Be relaxed. Many students enjoy conversation groups when they sense the leader's spontaneous nature and excitement about learning.

## Facilitate, Don't Dominate:

- Use open-ended questions and ask students for clarification, examples, and definitions.
- Look around the whole group after asking a question, **making eye contact with each student.** Ask every student for their response.
- Summarize student responses without taking a stand one way or another. It is your obligation to allow everyone's voices to be heard.
- Invite students to address one another and not always "go through" you.
- Pause to give students time to reflect on your summaries or others' comments.

- If no one responds to one of your questions, count to ten in your head before rephrasing the question or moving on.
- Ask students to elaborate answers rather than immediately correcting them yourself.
- Take notes of main points on the board or overhead and write everyone’s ideas down.
- **Silence is okay, really!** Allow everyone to use this time to think.
  - Count to 15 silently to figure out when it’s time to move on.
  - For students who are not as willing to speak up, ask prompting questions like “What are your thoughts on this topic?” Make sure to use that exact language.

## Strategic body language:

- Nod your head encouragingly and let each student finish their point without interruption.
- Try not to cross your arms or frown when students are speaking. These are discouraging signals.

## How to increase participation:

- Bring up some relevant material—statistics, maps, and facts are good.
- Think-Pair-Share: ask each student to turn to the student next to them and discuss the problem or question; after this, they will have some ideas to share with the class as a whole.
- Get students talking to each other, not just to you.
- Pose an either/or question. Have the class physically divide into groups—those who favor one side, another side, and those who are undecided.

## At the end of the dialogue:

- Review the main ideas, the thread of the dialogue, and conclusions.

## Right after the dialogue:

- Give your input!
  - Every week, we will email you a link to a quick (1 minute) feedback survey for **Idea Dialogue participants**. Filling out the survey will help us **improve the curriculum for next year** and, importantly, **will give the student credit** for attending the Idea Dialogues session. **The more students who complete the surveys from your school, the more seats we can save for your school!**
  - Student Leaders will receive check-up surveys every few weeks.
- Occasionally, talk to at least these 2 people: the student who spoke least and the one who spoke most. Ask them what they thought about the dialogue. Ask them the following questions. Don’t be defensive—just listen.
  - What did we (the other Student Leader and I) do well? 4
  - How can we improve?

- o What was your favorite part and question? What was your least favorite?
- Present the activations and encourage students to perform the activations based on the topics they feel most passionate about. At the following Idea Dialogues session, spend 5 minutes talking about any activations performed for last week's topic. Participants will also have a chance to talk about their activation results in their weekly surveys.

## Other Instructions:

1. With your other Student Leader, select this week's topic.
  - a. The topics are tiered into 4 groups to give you the flexibility of talking about topics that are the most appropriate for your community.
    - Tier 1: Human Rights, Brains & Mental Health, and Education Systems
    - Tier 2: Religion, Sexual Assault, and Gender
    - Tier 3: Gun Violence, Immigration, and Identity
2. Set aside 1 to 2 hours per Idea Dialogue to fully dialogue about each topic. Depending on your schedule and participants' availabilities, we recommend one of the following, using a teacher's classroom (note that, in order to preserve the raw, open nature of these conversations, we recommend that teachers refrain from participating):
  - a. After school (preferred because the sessions would be longer)
  - b. Split up over 2-3 lunch periods

## Weekly topic plan:

### 1. Human Rights

- TED Talks:
  - a. **Refugees have the right to be protected** ([ted.com/talks/2397](http://ted.com/talks/2397))
  - b. **Why climate change is a threat to human rights** ([ted.com/talks/2331](http://ted.com/talks/2331))
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," wrote Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in response to a critique about his peaceful protest in Birmingham. He argued that the struggle for African American freedom in the United States was linked to the struggle for freedom and rights for other people around the world.
    - i. How could one type of oppression affect a right that you or the world has?
    - ii. How might we reaching universal human rights for everyone? What

would that look like? Should we invest time into reaching universal human rights and why?

- iii. What could we do in our communities to help minimize the violations of human rights?
  - b. Many people argue that human rights should be universal, yet sometimes individuals cite “tradition” or “culture” (i.e. forced/ child marriages, female genital mutilation, etc.) in response to better protecting the rights of individuals who are part of certain populations.
    - i. How would you respond to this argument?
    - ii. How should we decide what rights should be universal, if any?
    - iii. Should we allow countries with traditions to continue their traditions even if they break international human rights laws (i.e. female genital mutilation)?
    - iv. When is it justified to intervene and force another country to stop a tradition? If it is justified, who should intervene?
  - c. Human rights violations (i.e. ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and widespread starvation in Yemen due to the Yemen Civil War) exist in different parts of the world; however, it is sometimes hard for these human rights to be implemented. In many countries, human rights are part of the legal system (i.e. inalienable rights in the US constitution and in the first Amendment), but they are not enforced. How might we as a global community help promote human rights?
- Activations:
    - a. Download the **UNA Model UN App** (<http://unausa.org/global-classrooms-model-un/for-educators/curriculum/human-rights>) and Complete the Human Rights Unit. The Model United Nations App makes you an ambassador to help solve the world's toughest problems. Without needing any previous knowledge of the UN or Model UN, students can become diplomats and learn leadership, problem-solving, and public speaking skills in a 60-minute lesson plan.
    - b. The **Stand Up For Someone's Rights** (<http://standup4humanrights.org>) website includes a variety of actions you can take to stand up for human rights in everyday life, including:
      - Speak up for tolerance and against prejudice. Keep yourself in check by challenging your own views and prejudices.
      - Consider the human rights track record of companies before shopping.

## 2. Brains and Mental Health

- TED Talks:

- a. **The bridge between suicide and life** (ted.com/talks/1997)
- b. **Towards a new understanding of mental illness** (ted.com/talks/1714)
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Is mental illness treated like other illness (i.e. cancer, heart disease, etc.)? If not, should they be? Is our society reluctant to give mental illness immediate medical care? Why?
  - b. Is there a stigma surrounding someone who has a diagnosable mental illness? Why / why not? If so, what does this stigma look like?
  - c. How does the media portray mental illness? Do you think that shows like *Thirteen Reasons Why* promote healthy discussion or inaccurately portray mental illness?
  - d. Does our society effectively teach us how to deal with mental illness or how to help someone that is dealing with one? Should it? Why?
  - e. “Nature vs. nurture” is an ongoing debate that focuses on what has a greater impact on human behavior. “Nature” refers to the impact of biology / genes on human traits, and nurture describes the influence of learning and other influences from one's environment. Discuss the idea of “nature vs. nurture” in relation to mental illness. Are they related?
- Activations:
  - a. Download the apps **Self Checkout** (IOS only), **The Tapping Solution**, and/ or **Daylio- Journal, Diary, Moods** to help you take care of your mental health. The apps allow you to track how you feel so that you can keep track of your thoughts, feelings, and mental health. **The Tapping Solution** has different types of meditation and ways to help relieve some stress and anxiety.
  - b. Read through the source “**Symptoms and Treatments of Mental Disorders**” (<https://psychcentral.com/disorders/>) different mental illnesses and learn about the symptoms and treatment options.

### 3. Education Systems

- TED Talks:
  - a. **Do schools kill creativity?** (ted.com/talks/66)
  - b. **The child-driven education** (ted.com/talks/949)
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Does the curriculum in schools prepare students for the real world?
  - b. What could be changed to help students be more successful in the real world?
    - i. Is the way school is set up detrimental to long-term learning (gaining new knowledge and retaining it for a long period of time)? How?
    - ii. How could we change the current education system to allow students to

- learn, rather than to cram and memorize?
    - iii. Is it important for students to take courses in math, history, science, and English even if they aren't interested in those subjects?
  - c. The US public school system receives most of its funding from taxes; however, poorly-funded schools lack the opportunities in well-funded schools.
    - i. Should we create equal opportunity for all students? Why? How?
    - ii. Should everyone have a fair and equal education? Why?
- Activations:
  - a. Redesign how your classes are taught to how you would think most students would benefit and learn long-term. Make sure to detail which classes are required to graduate high school and which classes students can take if they would like to pursue something that interests them. Also, include how classes will be taught and what homework, tests, etc. will given. Justify your new design and how you think it will be beneficial to all students.

## 4. Religion

- TED Talks:
  - a. **I grew up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here's why I left** ([ted.com/talks/2703](http://ted.com/talks/2703))
  - b. **What my religion really says about women** ([ted.com/talks/2298](http://ted.com/talks/2298))
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. What factors contribute to stereotypes and preconceived notions about specific religious groups? Should we work towards breaking religious stereotypes? If so, how?
  - b. There is debate in some European countries, especially France, about the appropriateness of certain forms of traditional Islamic dress, especially in schools and other state institutions. In 2011, France banned Muslim women from covering their face with a burqa. Should governments have the right to deny people of wearing religious symbols (headscarves, burqas, turbans, etc.)? Why?
  - c. Should governments have the ability to intervene in religious practices? Why?
  - d. Should governments be guided by religious principles? Why?
- Activations:
  - a. With other students of different religious backgrounds, create a mural or art display that symbolizes interreligious cooperation and solidarity. Ask local art shops or museums to display the art you created.

- b. Working with other students of different religious backgrounds, start a club at your school that promotes interfaith dialogue and cooperation; ask for help from local religious centers or from interfaith organizations in your community.

## 5. Sexual Assault

- TED Talks:
  - a. **Why women stay silent after sexual assault** (ted.com/talks/3591)
  - b. **How can we end sexual harassment at work** (ted.com/talks/3680)
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Are there any widely-accepted social roles, behaviors, and group dynamics that support the potential development of sexual aggression?
  - b. How does having power affect one's sense of privilege? How might that lead to oppression or abuse?
  - c. There is often no concrete evidence backing allegations of sexual assault.. Since the American justice system assumes the accused are "innocent until proven guilty," how might we effectively go about addressing sexual assault allegations in court?
- Activations:
  - a. Start a club at your school that focuses on sexual assault and harassment and works towards preventing it in your school and local community. Research the topic, create posters to display at your school, host events for the school to attend, etc.

## 6. Gender / Gender Stereotypes

- TED Talks:
  - c. **Why I'm done trying to be "man enough"** (ted.com/talks/4755)
  - d. **Why gender equality is good for everyone – men included** (ted.com/talks/2329)
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Growing up, girls often play with dolls, while boys often play with toy guns. Why is this? Does this matter? Should this be encouraged or discouraged?
  - b. Gender socialization is the process of learning the social expectations and attitudes associated with one's sex. Are gender differences mainly because of biology? Or more because of socialization?
  - c. With most sports, men and women are separated in order to ensure fairness. Should gender ever be a determining factor in a job interview, at school, or anywhere? Why?
  - d. Should we try to break gender stereotypes? If so, how?

- e. Often, public spaces do not reflect people who have non-conventional gender identities (transgender, nonbinary, etc.). Should public spaces be required to include public spaces for people who have non-conventional gender identities?
- Activations:
  - a. Read through **“LGBTQ+ Definitions”** (<http://www.transstudent.org/definitions/>) and watch this video on the relationship between gender, sexuality, and gender expression, **“Human Sexuality is Complicated...”** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=xXAoG8vAyzl>).

## 7. Gun Violence

- TED Talks:
  - a. **My son was a Columbine shooter. This is my story.** ([ted.com/talks/2681](http://ted.com/talks/2681))
  - b. **Most Mass Shooters Are Not Mentally Ill** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXFBXhgZHJc>)
  - c. **A solution to gun violence found in US history** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgHELssUSZU>)
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. The Second Amendment to the Constitution says, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” How does, and how should, the Second Amendment apply to America today?
  - b. Do you think that mass shooters share common personality characteristics? If so, what are they and how can people identify those traits early on? If not, why?
  - c. Would fewer people owning guns mean fewer gun-related deaths? How do we prevent gun-related violence in schools?
  - d. The National Rifle Association ran a campaign for many years based on the slogan that “guns don’t kill people, it’s people who kill people.”
  - e. Which is more important: security or liberty? Why? How would you define each
- Activations:
  - a. Learn how to identify when someone is at risk. Sandy Hook Promise, an advocacy group founded by family members of victims killed at the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, has trained more than two million students and adults in their **Know the Signs** ([https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/prevention\\_programs](https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/prevention_programs)) programs, which helps people identify at-risk behaviors, especially on social media, and learn how to respond effectively.
  - b. Research South Carolina’s gun laws **here** (<http://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/state-law/South-Carolina/>) and see how they compare with other states’ on the Giffords Law Center site. Also research pending South Carolina gun legislation. Click **here** (<https://www.scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php>) to identify your national

and state legislators. Ask your national and state legislators to sponsor pending legislation in Congress or the State House, respectively, that your school community supports. Your campaign will have the most impact if you choose a local policy maker to address your petition to.

## 8. Identity/ Diversity

- TED Talks:
  - a. **How diversity makes teams more innovative** ([ted.com/talks/3585](http://ted.com/talks/3585))
  - b. **The revolutionary power of diverse thought** ([ted.com/talks/3269](http://ted.com/talks/3269))
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Why is diversity important? What would the world be like if everyone shared the same culture, spoke the same language, ate the same food, looked the same, and dressed the same?
  - b. How can diversity be encouraged in our current political climate and what are the negative outcomes as a result of not addressing diversity in the school, workplace, and community settings? Should people assimilate to others, or should everyone have the right to express themselves as they would like?
  - c. What are the benefits of being exposed to individuals with different and complex ideas that may differ from your ideology on certain issues?
- Activations:
  - a. Have students that film a short clip of themselves talking about their diversity and why it is important to them. Compile all the short clips into one longer clip that highlights the diversity in your community.
  - b. Plan and host an event at your school to celebrate the diversity among the students. Have students speak, perform, sing, etc. and educate the audience about different identities / cultures. You can even have a potluck with different types of food.

## 9. Immigration

- TED Talks:
  - a. **What we're missing in the debate about immigration** ([ted.com/talks/2879](http://ted.com/talks/2879))
  - b. **What it's like to be the child of immigrants** ([ted.com/talks/15284](http://ted.com/talks/15284))
- Dialogue Questions:
  - a. Immigrants have been labeled as criminals and a drain on the US economy. What aspects are not being considered in developing this characterization of the immigrant community? Do ethnic stereotypes play into this? If so, how?
  - b. Should immigrants assimilate themselves into their new culture, or should they retain their own identities? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the two strategies?

- c. Some immigrants illegally cross borders in search of better lives for their families. If an individual has entered a country illegally, what should be done with them?
- d. The European Union (EU) needs immigrants because many countries in the EU have a stagnant or declining natural population. It would prefer to attract qualified doctors, engineers, etc. from developing countries to fill its own needs. Is it moral for rich countries to attract these trained professionals from developing countries?
- Activations:
  - a. Research about different immigration stories on the news. Try looking into different news sources. Important and relevant issues now include: the wall as a border between the US and Mexico and the caravan migrants that left from Central America and reached the Mexican-American border.
  - b. Download the app **US Citizenship Test 2019 USCIS** and take the test to see how well you would do on the US citizen test all legal immigrants must take to become US citizens.