

ACTIVITY 5: GREAT LAKES TRAIL EXPLORATION & DEBATE



The purpose of this activity is for students to research and analyze new and planned trails in the Great Lakes Region in order to develop persuasive argumentation skills through a debate about which trail is, or will be, the best in the region.

Materials:

- Notebooks and pens
- A word processing app or program
- Access to the Internet and research materials
- Digital presentation tools
- Classroom or meeting space

First, inform students that they will work with a partner to research and participate in a debate about the best new and planned trails in the Great Lakes Region. Have students partner up with a classmate. Each pair will be responsible for selecting one trail out of all the trails in the region to argue is the best new or planned trail. Some examples might include the [Michigan Dragon Trail](#), Minnesota's Superior Hiking Trail or [Redhead Mountain Bike Park](#), the Ice Age Trail in Wisconsin, or a planned trail like the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail in Michigan.

Next, allow students time to research trails and provide them with the following resources to aid in their research:

- [New and Planned Trails Map](#)
- [Great Lakes Trails List](#)

Then, guide students to narrow their research and debate planning by emphasizing specific trail features: natural beauty, location, accessibility, amenities, and unique traits. Each group must create a digital presentation or poster with visuals like pictures, maps, and interesting trail facts, regardless of whether the trail is planned or existing.

Last, upon completing research and creating presentations, students should present their trails to the class and make the case for why their selected trail is the best. Counterpoints and questions from the audience are welcome. All students should take notes on each trail they hear about and then vote on the most compelling trail presentations. The top 4 enter into a structured tournament-style debate.

Debate:

Two trails will face off against each other at a time.

- **Format:** The order of the debates will be predetermined (e.g., Trail A vs. Trail B, Trail C vs. Trail D). Debates follow a structured format. During the debate, there will be three timed rounds:
 - presentation (5 min)
 - rebuttal (2.5 min)
 - questions (5 min)
- **Process:** Each pair of trails will take turns presenting their research and making persuasive arguments for why their chosen trail is (or will be) the best to visit in the Great Lakes Region. It's crucial for students to highlight the unique features and attractions of their trail, but they must also point out how their trail directly compares to the trail of their opponent in the debate. Their opponent gets to present their trail in the same way, before each gets a chance for a rebuttal and then in the final round to ask their opponent three questions.
- **Voting:** The winners of the semi-final debates will be determined by popular vote. The winners of the semi-final debates will then proceed to the final debate using the same format. Remind students before voting that factors such as accessibility, natural beauty, trail conditions, recreational opportunities, and uniqueness should be included in their decision of the winner.