Best Practices Idea

MEDICAL ETHICS: CLASS DEBATE STYLE! (for a 9-12th grade class of good readers)

BEFOREHAND PREP: Find a single in-depth article about whatever issue you are studying, 1-3 pages long.
Carefully formulate one sentence, "the resolution," which will be the focus of your debate.
The resolution you create must be an idea which is easily debateable on both PRO and CON sides by reading/using just the one article.

Broad Examples include Resolved: Doctors should be required to tell the truth LATER to patients for whom they have prescribed placebos.
   - Resolved: Euthanasia is a moral choice.
   - Resolved: Patients have the right to refuse medical treatment.
   - Resolved: Organ transplant recipients should be chosen in a more equitable manner.
   - Resolved: Parents have the right to refuse medical treatment for their children.
   - Resolved: All Americans deserve free basic health care.

Narrow Examples are easier to debate:
   - Resolved: The 20 year old boy (in some article) should get the organ donation instead of the 50 year old woman.
   - Resolved: Dr. Kevorkian should receive an official pardon and apology.

DAY 1: Hand out to every student a copy of your single in-depth article.
Introduce the topic with a hook like "What if YOUR family had to decide...", then read a bit of the article aloud together.
Have students read the rest silently, encouraging them to mark PRO arguments with one color highlighter, and CON arguments with another color.
At the end of the class period, choose 4 students to present a debate. Give them 2-4 days so they can research more on their own if they wish.

DAY 2: (not the next day, but 2-4 days later)
The rest of the class participates by actively taking notes and writing personal responses after every speech, then by voting (on paper) for a winning team and supporting their vote with a written "Reason for Decision." Perhaps other kids could be chosen to debate another topic later on.

40 minute Format for the 4 debaters' Presentation (PRO pair: supports the Resolution  CON pair: does NOT support the Resolution)

PRO 1 speaks first, using about 3 minutes to explain her 3 reasons why she supports the Rez
CON 1 speaks next, using about 3 minutes to explain his 3 reasons why he does not support the Rez
PRO 2 speaks, using about 3 minutes to explain why she disagrees with each of the CON's 3 initial arguments.
CON 2 speaks, using about 3 minutes to explain why he disagrees with each of the PRO's 3 initial arguments.

At this point, it's fun to allow the kids all to question each other, and it's especially insightful to allow class questions and comments.

REBUTTALS: by each of the 4, in the same order, using 1-2 minutes to explain/expand/review her favorite/best arguments overall

Closing: The debaters all shake hands, the class applauds and writes its decisions silently. You will collect and grade these later.
If time allows, ask each debater to state a compliment to his/her opponent. Ex: "the argument you made that was hardest for me to rebut was..."
If time allows, ask audience members to compliment each debater, and/or state/list the most convincing/compelling arguments.