

Ezra Kanarick and Zoe Garderet
Free Will and Determinism

Goal: Expose students to the debate between free will and determinism by exploring theories on both sides. Think about possible balance or overlap, and the implications of proposed theories.

I. Warmup (~5 minutes)

- Rock, Paper, Scissors tournament. The students pair off and play each other, then the winners play each other until there is one champion.

II. Defining Free Will (~5 minutes)

- Ask the students if anyone has heard of the debate over free will, and have a student try to describe the concept. After students explain what they know, Ezra and Zoe add to the explanations/give a mini crash course on free will and determinism.
- Connect the idea of free will to the Rock Paper Scissors game: Ask the winner if he/she won because of his/her own choices.
 - Why did students make their choices?
 - Do they feel like their result was because of personal choices, or was it pre-determined?

III. Discussion:

- Discuss the first cause: Do you think this theory is too determinist?
- What are some situations in which the students feel they have a lot of, or a little free will? (What family we are born into versus how short we cut our hair)
- What are the implications of whether or not we have free will?
- Do you have positive and negative associations with free will or determinism? Do you find free will more liberating than determinism? Why?
 - Jean-Paul Sartre: “Man is condemned to be free.” Explain Sartre’s radical free will and his perspective that free will gives us a burden of freedom: If there is free will, does this mean we have a crippling responsibility?
 - Nihilism and absurdism
- Might we be living in a simulation? How do these theories help us understand this possibility? Would we have free will in a simulation, and would those who made the simulation have free will in the way that they control the simulation?
- How does biology factor into this? Does our consciousness of our own decision making affect free will?
 - Psychological studies on consciousness of choice, biology studies on probiotics