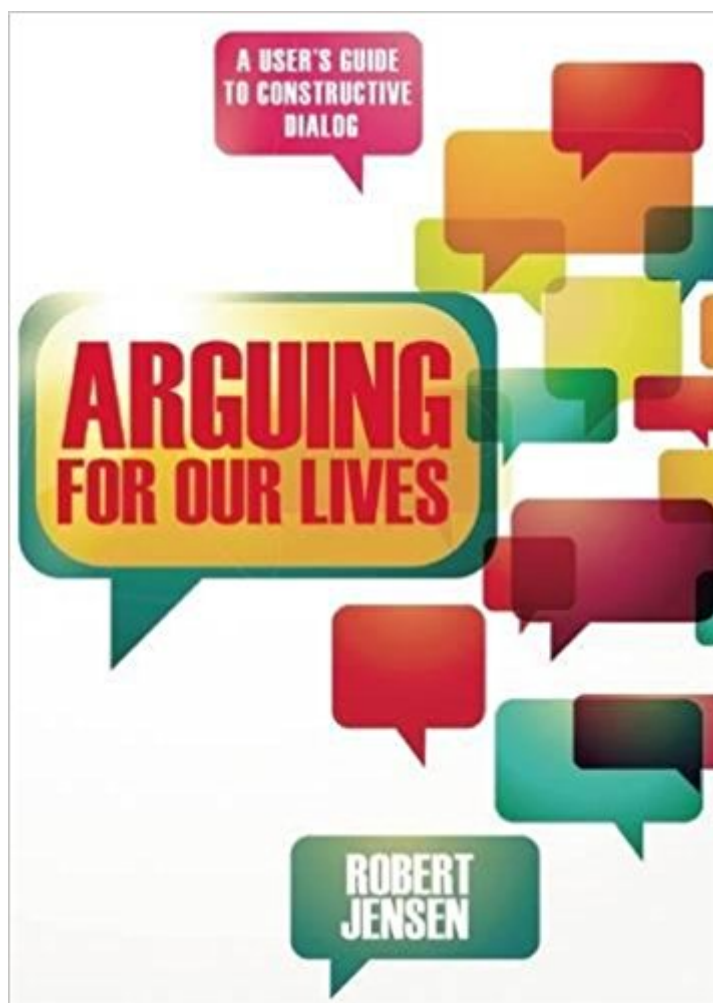


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# Arguing For Our Lives: A User's Guide To Constructive Dialog



## Synopsis

We live in a time when public discourse is more skewed than ever by the propaganda that big money can buy, with trust in the leadership of elected officials at an all-time low. The "news" has degenerated into sensationalist sound bites, and the idea of debate has become a polarized shouting match that precludes any meaningful discussion. It's also a time of anxiety, as we're faced with economic and ecological crises on a global scale, with stakes that seem higher than ever before. In times like these, it's essential that we be able to think and communicate clearly. In this lively primer on critical thinking, Robert Jensen attacks the problems head on and delivers an accessible and engaging book that explains how we can work collectively to enrich our intellectual lives. Drawing on more than two decades of classroom experience and community organizing, Jensen shares strategies on how to challenge "conventional wisdom" in order to courageously confront the crises of our times and offers a framework for channeling our fears and frustrations into productive analysis that can inform constructive action. Jensen connects abstract ideas with the everyday political and spiritual struggles of ordinary people. Free of either academic or political jargon, this book is for anyone struggling to understand our world and contribute to making it a better place. Robert Jensen is a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and a founding board member of the Third Coast Activist Resource Center. "At the moment, what passes for political debate is the bickering of two vociferous and wrong-headed parties. Robert Jensen reacquaints us with the political and social skills we'll need if we're to reclaim politics for the 21st century. This is a brave book, one that packs more wisdom in its few pages than a shelf's worth of political theory, because it's also a book about political practice. Jensen patiently, honestly, and rigorously exemplifies the highest virtues of a public intellectual." —Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World's Food System* "The first date or dinner party taboo is famous: 'No religion, no politics.' Debating, discussion, engagement with ideas that matter — these are all supposed to be left to professionals, specialists who talk to each other in mutually incomprehensible ways. Meanwhile decades of advertising, sound bites, PR, filtered information, and internet trolling have numbed us even more. But we don't have to live this way. We could immediately start living in a better world, one in which every conversation was an opportunity to learn more about ourselves, others, and the precious little world we all have to try to live on together. To do that, though, we would have to re-learn how to think and talk, how to agree and disagree. Robert Jensen's *Arguing For Our Lives* can help us do that." —Justin Podur, Associate Professor, York University and author of *Haiti's New Dictatorship* (Pluto Press 2012) "Arguing for Our Lives is a crucial book for reclaiming not only the pedagogical and political

virtues of critical thinking, but for securing the foundations for critical agency and engaged citizenship. This is an indispensable book for students, educators, and others willing to fight the current ongoing assault by religious, political, and moral fundamentalists on critical thought, if not reason itself, that has engulfed American politics. Everyone should read *Arguing for Our Lives* if they believe there is a connection between how we think and how we act, how we understand democracy and how we experience and struggle for it."#151;Henry Giroux, author of *Twilight of the Social: Resurgent Politics in the Age of Disposability* (Paradigm, 2012)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The book provides clear, 'simple but not simplistic' frameworks for engaging in more constructive dialog about the issues that matter most."#151;Andy Lee Roth, YES! Magazine"A potent attack on the rabid, irrational saber-rattling that passes for political and social discourse today, *Arguing for Our Lives* is a cogent, closely argued, sober, yet passionate call for ordinary men and women to help save our democracy by reclaiming our intellect, by honing our powers of rational argumentation."#151;Tirdad Derakhshani, Philadelphia Inquirer"A pamphlet in the classic sense of all good-hearted propaganda, *Arguing For Our Lives: A User's Guide to Constructive Dialog*, addresses America's fear of intellectualism and the trepidation many people (including Dr. Jensen's journalism students) feel about claiming the very achievable title of critical thinker."#151;Roberto Ontiveros, San Antonio Current"Do you completely trust the sensational,

sound-byte driven news and polarized politicians who never seem to say anything at all, unless it is a totally frightening slip? In a time when public discourse is rife with big-money propaganda, we need to work even harder to think and communicate clearly. While Jensen has honed his critical thinking years over two decades in the classroom, this is a jargon-free book that will enable you to, in the here and now, make small, meaningful steps toward a better world." •Alexis Coe, SF Weekly

Robert Jensen has long been one of the most vocal iconoclasts in Austin and the country, someone who isn't afraid to eloquently state his politics even when the national temperature would keep most people out of the kitchen. His latest book, *Arguing for Our Lives*, acts as a guidebook to rhetoric and our popular dialogues indicting ideas of neutrality, stilted notions of 'being political', but also encouraging us to passionately discuss the things we're not supposed to in polite company. Jensen salvages the word 'intellectual' from its present nadir, demystifies the application of critical thinking skills to everyday problems, and shows how ideology and politicization are inevitable products of point of view; the more visible we can make them, the more honest the conversations we can begin to have. It's a fascinating read that explains his own personal teaching philosophy, while exposing the ways in which our language can shroud our intents and content." •Austin Chronicle

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Jensen offers clear frameworks for engaging in constructive dialog about the issues that matter rather than shouting matches, or "That's just my opinion" or "America, love it or leave it." In a clear accessible manner, he explains how to note and defend your assumptions, clearly define what you mean by your terms, and offer evidence and reasoning to support your opinions. He discusses approaching questions ecologically, societally and personally and attempting to understand our world philosophically, historically and sociologically. He includes chapters about thinking critically about politics, religion and news media. He introduces Abe Osheroff, a political organizer going back to the 1930s who died in 2008. Osheroff made the point that though we all have greed as part of our core, it is in our self-interest to pursue a path of generosity, love, and affection.

Jensen advocates civil discourse about controversial issues. The standard prescription for first date and dinner party conversation has always been "No religion and no politics." Jensen wants us to have more conversations about religion, politics, the news media, and the environment. He provides lots of advice for having good conversations about such things, common sense advice that is also informed by research. He does not pretend to have the answers to the multiple crises we face, but

argues that we are not likely to find any answers if we do not engage in more frequent, serious conversations about them. I am a sociology teacher, and have found a wealth of good ideas for improving the quality of the discussions we have in my classes. But I recommend the book to anyone interested in getting beyond talking only about the weather, sports, movies, TV programs, and the follies of their absent neighbors.

Thought provoking.

This should be required reading for all citizens Thought provoking. a wake up call. Start the conversation.. If not now, when.

This is a splendid book and I've already recommended it to several people. Author Jensen provides a clear analysis of where we stand and why. Really can't praise it too highly.

a great book for educators and parents

Jensen moves beyond the abstract and applies critical thinking skills and theories to major concerns in today's world. It is a useful and insightful book, a rich source for the reader who wishes to make wise, informed decisions when facing the challenges posed by religion, politics, and personal relations. The text is highly readable.

I thought I was buying a book that would provide insights into the mechanics of critical thinking. What I felt I got was Mr. Jensen's points of view without providing evidence for his beliefs. If one is going to advocate defending a position using facts, not opinions, then I wish Mr. Jensen would have practiced what he preaches.

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