

Primary Debating Handbook

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Welcome



Dear Teacher,

If you are interested in introducing debating into your primary classroom, then this short guide is for you!

Debating is a fun, educational way of encouraging your students to really engage with topics. Learning to debate teaches students how to apply critical analysis and how to prepare an argument using facts and sound research. It also teaches students valuable communication skills such as how to deliver a speech and how to effectively defend the points they make.

Debating can take many forms. If you are interested in entering a team in competitive debating, this handbook will offer some guidance on how formal debating works and the rules of debating.

However debating is also a useful teaching methodology. The components of debating can be applied across a range of curriculum areas and can help your students develop higher order skills. Debating exercises can be used for group work and for whole class activities.



This handbook is not intended to be a definitive guide but aims instead to offer some guidance to any teacher looking for an introduction on debating in the primary classroom.

Enjoy!

Introduction to Primary Debating



Why teach debating?

How is this relevant in my classroom? I'm not sure I want to encourage a lot of arguments!

You may think that the last thing you need to teach your students is how to debate. You may feel that some of them are well able to argue already!

However, debating teaches us how to put together a well-formed, researched argument or point of view which we are then able to defend. It also teaches us to listen to opposing view-points and to critically evaluate information.



Using Debates in your classroom

What is a debate?

A formal argument where groups or individuals present opposing views about particular issue according to a set of rules.



Using Debate in the classroom can help enable a child in 5th or 6th class to meet the following learning outcomes as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills:





- discuss issues of major concern.
- use a discussion of the familiar as the basis of a more formal or objective grasp of a topic or concept.
- listen to a presentation on a particular topic, decide through discussion which are the most appropriate questions to ask, and then prioritise them.
- argue points of view from the perspective of agreement and disagreement through informal discussion and in the context of formal debates.
- justify and defend particular opinions or attitudes and try to persuade others to support a particular point of view.
- respond to arguments presented by the teacher.
- discuss the value, truth or relevance of popular ideas, causes and proverbs.





ACTIVITY 1:

Where do you stand?



PURPOSE

This activity invites students to form an opinion on a particular issue, to not be afraid to let others know where they stand, to give reasons for their opinion and to change their opinion if persuaded to do so after discussion with others.

MATERIALS

Four sheets of chart paper, each labelled in large letters with one of the following:

- *Strongly Agree*
- *Agree,*
- *Disagree,*
- *Strongly Disagree*

PREPARATION

Place one of the four sheets in each corner of the room.

Prepare a list of statements upon which you want students to *Take a Stand.*

This activity is best suited to an area where students can move about freely such as a hall or gymnasium.

ACTIVITY

Gather the class in the centre of the room and point out the four sheets in each of the corners.

Tell the students that you are going to read out a number of statements and that you want the students to go and stand in the corner that best describes how they feel about the statement.

An example of statements are:

- School uniforms should be banned
- Homework is good for us
- There is nothing I can do about climate change

Encourage students to voice their opinions from their respective corners…."so this group over here disagrees with banning school uniforms?...tell us why? Etc

After some discussion from each of the corners ask the students if any of them would like to change corners and if so to give a reason…perhaps they were convinced by a comment from one of the other corners…

Invite each group from each of the corners to work together to write a clear statement explaining their position.

ACTIVITY 2:

I couldn't disagree more



PURPOSE:

This is a good exercise to help students listen to another point of view as well as learn how to respectfully disagree (refutation and rebuttal) while offering their own point of view.

PREPARATION:

Find/create a space where the class can line up facing one another.

Prepare a list of statements similar to Activity 1.

ACTIVITY

Have students line up facing one another about two feet apart.

One side is 'proposition' the other is 'opposition'.

Read out a statement, e.g ''all Zoos should be banned'.

The first person on the Proposition side repeats the line and gives a reason why e.g 'All zoos should be banned because animals belong in the wild and not behind bars'.

The first person in the Opposition line then says; 'I couldn't disagree more because animals in zoos today are extremely well treated and get lots of proper care.

The second person in the proposition line then says I couldn't disagree with you more, all zoos should be banned because…

And so it goes back and forth until no new points can be made.

Once all of the students have had a chance to propose or oppose the motion ask the proposition side to repeat any points or arguments they heard from the opposition side and vice versa.

Ask for a show of hands on the motion… does the class believe Zoos should be banned?

Move on to the next statement.

P.S a student who would prefer not to make a point for whatever reason can just say 'pass'.

ACTIVITY 3:

Say it with style



PURPOSE:

To help students identify different styles of speaking some of which are very helpful and others they should try and avoid.

MATERIALS:

- Prompt cards
- Stop watch (phone)
- Bell
- Youtube (optional)

PREPARATION:

Prepare two sets of prompt cards one marked 'topic' and the other marked 'style'.

On each of the 'topic' cards write a subject (topic) that the student can speak about for up to 1 minute e.g my favourite foods, my superpower, countries I would like to visit, games I like to play etc. Make sure you have enough cards for every student in the class.

On each of the 'style' cards write how you want the student to speak…e.g. Mumble, speak very quickly cough a lot, speak too loud, do not look at the person you are speaking to, use your hands a lot when you speak, be confident, be very nervous, use lots of 'emms', be angry etc. Make sure you have enough cards for everyone in the class. (You can use the same style a number of times).

Place the two sets of cards beside one another.

ACTIVITY

- Divide students into pairs
- Ask each student to take a card; one from the topic pack and one from the style pack
- Tell them not to show their cards to their partner
- Tell them that they must speak for up to one minute on the topic that has been given to them
- Allow the students a couple of minutes to think about the topic and what they want to say
- Tell them they must deliver their speech in the style they have been given…for example speak about my favourite food (topic) using lots of 'emmms' and 'ers' (style)
- Ask speaker 1 to start…go for one minute and ring the bell
- Ask all those who were listening what they felt about what their partner was saying…were they easy to listen to? Could you understand them? Were they interesting?…can they identify the style the speaker was asked to use?
- Repeat the exercise inviting speaker 2 to go for one minute
- Ask all those who were listening the same questions as above
- As a class make a list of things that make us good communicators
- As a class make a list of things that make us less effective communicators
- Once the activity is complete you can show Youtube clips of various well known people giving speeches such as Emma Watson, Barack Obama, President Michael D. Higgins, Malalla Youseffi, Martin Luther King

FOR MORE CLASSROOM DEBATES ACTIVITIES
email: oyirwothbright@gmail.com

Research

Researching a debating motion provides a great opportunity for whole class involvement.

Initially it may be difficult for students to come up with suggestions for debating motions. They may find it hard to pick a question or topic with two sides. Or they may choose a topic that everyone would find easy to agree with but which nobody wants to oppose.

Start by providing some topics you choose for the class until they start to come up with their own. You can link some of these directly to what they are studying or learning about in some subject area. You might want to choose something topical from the current news cycle, providing it is not too complex! Throw in some fun, non-academic, youth culture debates or some wacky ones eg.

> The colour red is much more useful than the colour blue.

> Cats make better pets than dogs.

As a whole class exercise, brainstorm the topic from both sides. Start with the proposing arguments. Discuss how they might group some arguments together. Work until there are three main arguments. Do the same with the opposing side. Then divide the class into six teams. Ask students on each team to decide who will speak first, second and third. Everyone in the team needs to work on their particular side of the argument.

Sources

This is a good opportunity to develop skills in understanding different sources of information. It links to the history curriculum but also to English and literacy.



Some questions you might ask the class to think about;

- Where can we go to look for information?
- What is the difference between a primary source and a secondary source?
- How can we choose which source is better? What role does memory play?
- How do we know how trustworthy/reliable our source is?

This also presents a good opportunity to discuss how we use the Internet as a source of information. How do we use search engines? Understanding how they work.

Can we tell who has put up information? How can we tell if it is accurate? How to tell if the website we are looking at is an official website or not? Encourage children to look at web addresses.

Apart from the internet, what other places can we look for information? Is the author of the information from the time or are they writing after the fact? Were they there and is it a first-hand account or do we know if they are a reliable witness?

Collecting primary sources (SESE/ Maths Integration)

This can become a class activity in itself. It could be linked to history class- they could interview a parent or grandparent about an aspect of the topic, where relevant.



For example, for a topic such as "Children spend too much time on computers", they could ask an older family member about life before smart phones were invented!

Or you could explore opportunities for integration with mathematics by collecting research information and exploring ways to present it in various forms such as graphs and polls. Is there a possibility of creating a survey of students in their school or an opinion poll among a number of classes? You could use the data to discuss mathematics representations such as fractions and percentages.

Useful websites

www.scoilnet.ie
www.kidfriendlysearch.com
www.funbrain.com
www.factmonster.com
www.kids.nationalgeographic.com
www.worldalmanacforkids.com
email: oyirwothbright@gmail.com

Refutation and rebuttal

This is a core component of debating. In essence, this is what differentiates debating from public speaking. Refutation and rebuttal are the methods of counter arguing. To refute an argument is to produce evidence (facts or figures) to prove it untrue. To rebut an argument is to discredit it by offering a completely different point of view.

Research is essential for putting together a strong argument. Communication is essential for delivering that argument.

But refutation and rebuttal are essential to debating your argument. In competitive debating, this can often be the deciding factor in winning a debate. Outside of competitive debating, the skills of refutation and rebuttal provide students with higher order skills of analysis and defence of an argument.

In order to be able to counter argue in a debate, students should research both sides of the topic or statement they are debating. That way they will be prepared for some of the points their opposition will use and be ready to answer those arguments with facts and statements of their own.

Is a picture worth a thousand words? OR Can I use a prop?



...the simple answer is no

We believe that debate is about the spoken word and the ability to persuade and convince through the power of speech and well-structured argument. At this early stage of their debates career (primary school) we feel it best to develop a student's oratorical powers rather than using a picture (or any prop) as a substitute…

Formal Debates



Moving on to formal debating should not be seen as anything daunting or intimidating. In fact, once your students become familiar with the format involved in debating, it becomes very easy to run mini debates with your class whenever a good topic arises.

The **motion** is usually a statement or sometimes a question. It should have two sides. Students often find it difficult to argue against motions they personally disagree with. This is something that takes practice. Allow them opportunities to debate unpopular topics e.g Computer games should be banned, summer holidays should be shorter etc.



As well as keeping a collection yourself, you could provide your class with a suggestion box where they could leave ideas for debating motions. Some may need work but that could happen as part of a whole class discussion- allow them to tweak and suggest how to improve or strengthen a motion.

What does a debate look like?

In a debate there are two teams. One team **proposes** or argues in favour of the motion and the other team **opposes** or is against the motion.

In general the home team is the proposition and the away team is the opposition but for neutral venues, teachers can decide between themselves.

The debate team

In the primary debating competition each team must have six members. At a formal debate there are three speakers per school. You can use your other members for timekeeping, research assistants, subs etc.

One member of the team is nominated as the captain. The make-up of the team doesn't need to stay the same for every debate - you may choose to rotate roles.

Speaking order

The captain of the proposition speaks first. The captain of the opposition speaks second. The second member of the proposition speaks next followed by the second member of the opposition. The third speakers follow next. Finally the captains summarise, this time with the captain of the opposition summing up first and finishing the debate with captain of the proposition.

The Captain's role



The captain is responsible for introducing their team. There are different ways to start a speech but the follow is an example;

"Chairperson, members of the audience, members of the opposition, we are here today to propose the motion that…"

The captain should introduce their team, outlining the arguments that each member will talk about. For example "Ciara will speak about how zoos have been important in conservation and Aoife will explain how schools benefit from trips to the zoo etc."

The captain is also responsible for speaking at the end. They need to summarise the points their team made and try to refute the arguments the opposition made or answer/defend any points against them during the debate.

The debate



Each team member should have a distinct point to talk about. Each speaker speaks for three minutes. They will be awarded points against them if they go over the time so it's a good idea to practice, practice, practice! Make sure they are familiar with hearing the bell to signal the time up. If they lose their train of thought and need to wrap up, teach them to finish with "therefore we propose/oppose the motion that….".

Practicing their speech also helps them to defeat nerves. Children are less likely to get nervous if they have had numerous practice runs.

Team work

Each member needs to stay engaged throughout the debate and not just for their own speech. They should have paper and pen at hand and jot down any useful points. They need to listen to the speakers before them to find opportunities for rebuttal and refutation.

After their speech, they should be looking for points to assist their captain in their summation. Marks are awarded for teamwork, so each member should be aware of the importance of making a contribution where they can.

Marking Sheets

During a debate marks are awarded according to different aspects of debating. In general marks are awarded to individual speakers for content and delivery. This can include use of sources and use of refutation and rebuttal. Captains are awarded marks for their particular duties. There are usually marks awarded for teamwork. Penalties can be incurred if speakers go beyond the allocated time allowed. It is recommended that teachers familiarize themselves and their team with the marking sheet prior to each debate. Copies of the marking sheet can be found on page 16.

Adjudicators



It is the role of the adjudicator to determine the marks awarded during the debate. After each speech they will award points according to the categories on the marking sheet. At the end of the debate, the adjudicators retire to a separate room to tally the scores and determine the result. The chief adjudicator delivers some feedback and announces the result of the debate to the audience. Tips for adjudicators can be found overleaf on pages 14 and 15. Feedback points for the Chief Adjudicator can be found on the back of the marking sheet.

Next Steps

Contact your local education centre to find out if there will be a competition run in your area.

Your education centre will assist you in registering and taking part. Competitions will run to a regional final but there will also be fun days run by Concern in regions across the country later in the year.



Adjudicator Marking Sheet: What Should I be Looking out for?



Thank you for agreeing to be an adjudicator, the primary debates simply couldn't happen without you.

REMEMBER…as an adjudicator it is your job to be completely neutral and impartial. You must be careful to assign marks according to the marking sheet and not because you personally agree or disagree with a particular side of the argument.

The following tips are here to help you to fill out the marking sheet.

MARKS for Captain, Speaker 1 and Speaker 2:

We recommend the following guide for assigning marks

Excellent	5
Good/Very Good	3 or 4
Need for improvement	1 or 2

Marks for Captain's Summation:

Excellent	9 or 10
Very Good	7 or 8
Good	5 or 6
Need for improvement	4 or less



CAPTAINS

Introduction of team arguments: The captain of each team will open the debate. In their 3 minute speech the captain should;

- **Define the motion:** Go over the main words of the motion and define any words or phrases that need clarification. For example in the motion 'Climate Change is not my problem' The captain will need to define (very briefly) what his/her team means by 'climate change' and should say why his/her team believes it is not their problem…
- **Introduce his/her teammates** and name the three arguments his/her team will be using in the debate e.g. as team captain I will argue that as a country Ireland is too small to make a difference to global climate change our second speaker Siobhan will argue that India, China and United States must deal with Climate Change first and our third speaker Cian, will argue that scientists are already coming up with solutions…
- **Start the debate:** The captain will then give the first of his/her teams three arguments which in the above example will be to argue *'why Ireland is too small to make a difference.'*

The Captain of the opposition will then go through the same process only defining, introducing and arguing from his/her teams' side of the motion.

Organisation and Clarity:

- Is the speaker well prepared?
- Is there an order or structure to the arguments used?
- Is the overall argument clear?

Use of Facts:

- Did the speaker present any facts (statistics or quotes) to support their argument rather than just giving their opinion?
- Did the speaker name the sources of these facts? E.g. "*According to the United Nations…"*

Relevance of arguments:

- Did the speaker stay on topic?
- Did the speaker present up to date information?
- Were the examples they used linked to the point they were making

Use of Rebuttal: This is a very important debating skill. Using rebuttal to counter an opponent's argument is what separates debating from public speaking.

- Did the speaker challenge their opponents on a particular point?
- Did the speaker effectively answer or address any of the points raised by their opponents?

Persuasiveness

- Did the speaker engage the audience by making eye contact, effective use of his/her hands or varying the tone of their voice?
- Did the speaker use 'appropriate' passion
- Did the speaker use the three minutes allotted to them? (Under-speaking can indicate lack of preparation)
- Did the speaker use humour?*

*Humour can be an effective 'tool' in debate, however make sure it is appropriate, fair to the opponents and relevant to the motion. Remember, debaters should 'play the ball not the (wo)man'. Sarcasm and inappropriate humour should be docked 1 or 2 marks in the Persuasiveness section.

Captain's Summation

The Captain's summation is like a Barrister's closing address before the jury. No new information should be introduced at this stage. The Captain's duty is to:

- Recap his/her own team's arguments
- Rebut the arguments of their opposing side

Points for Teamwork

- Did the debaters work together as a team?
- Did the debaters refer to each other's arguments?
- Did they help each other during the debate by passing on (whispering or writing on a piece of paper) possible points of rebuttal to the captain for his/her closing speech?



PRIMARY DEBATES

Adjudicator Marking Sheet



Venue: _____ **Date:** _____

Proposing School: _____

Opposing School: _____

PROPOSITION	MARKS
Captain	
Introduction of team's arguments/ Definition of the motion	/5
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Use of facts	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Captain	**/25**
Speaker 2	
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Use of facts	/5
Use of rebuttal	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Speaker 2	**/25**
Speaker 3	
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Use of facts	/5
Use of rebuttal	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Speaker 3	**/25**

OPPOSITION	MARKS
Captain	
Introduction of team's arguments/ Definition of the motion	/5
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Use of facts	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Captain	**/25**
Speaker 2	
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Use of facts	/5
Use of rebuttal	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Speaker 2	**/25**
Speaker 3	
Organisation and Clarity	/5
Relevance of arguments	/5
Use of facts	/5
Use of rebuttal	/5
Persuasiveness	/5
Total Prop. Speaker 3	**/25**

continued over

PROPOSITION	MARKS
Captain's Summation	
Recap of team's arguments	☐ /10
Rebutting Opposition's arguments	☐ /10
Total Captain's Summation	☐ **/20**
Points for teamwork	☐ **/5**
TEAM TOTAL	☐ **/100**
Deduct Time Penalties (deduct 1 point per minute over the 3 minute limit)	– ☐
PROP. FINAL TOTAL	☐

OPPOSITION	MARKS
Captain's Summation	
Recap of team's arguments	☐ /10
Rebutting Opposition's arguments	☐ /10
Total Captain's Summation	☐ **/20**
Points for teamwork	☐ **/5**
TEAM TOTAL	☐ **/100**
Deduct Time Penalties (deduct 1 point per minute over the 3 minute limit)	– ☐
OPP. FINAL TOTAL	☐

The motion was: please circle

Carried (proposition accumulated the most points)

Defeated (opposition accumulated the most points)



Adjudicator Feedback to students:

- ✓ Be positive and constructive
- ✓ Do not select one student for particular praise and **never** single out an individual student for criticism, rather refer to teams as a whole in a constructive way
- ✓ Highlight particular areas of strength such as the amount of research, the rebuttal, the clarity of argument and persuasion skills such as body language, use of voice and eye contact
- ✓ Give one or two suggestions for improvement such as "try to avoid reading your speeches and over-reliance on notes" or "make sure you let us know where you got your information from by quoting your sources", or "make sure you listen to your opponents and directly address their points by rebutting them" or if there have been time penalties to "make sure you stick within the two minute limit"
- ✓ Do not show the marking sheet to the debaters but be available to them after the debate if they seek out further advice.

On behalf of Concern Worldwide, your local Education Centre and the Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland;

Thank You.

PRIMARY DEBATES

Chairperson's Duties



This is just a guide for chairpersons – you don't have to follow this speech to the letter!

Welcome everyone, to today's Debate between (proposing school name and town or village) and (opposing school name and town or village).

And many thanks to name of the host school or venue for hosting this debate.

By exploring the issues we're debating today we hope that you as young people will learn more about each other, about our environment, and about our place in the world.

As you know, a debate is much like a conversation or an argument between two or more people with opposing views. I urge you all to listen carefully and to pay attention to what both teams have to say. Please do not interrupt or try to distract the debaters.

And now, to begin today's debate I call on the first speaker of the proposition *student's name* ..... from *school name*.....

Thank you. Now I call on the first speaker of the opposition ..... from school name.

Thank you. Now I call on ..... the second speaker from the proposition.

Thank you. Now I call on ..... the second speaker from the opposition.

Thank you. Now I call on ..... the third speaker from the proposition.

Thank you. Now I call on ..... the third speaker from the opposition

Thank you. Now I call on ..... again, the **captain of the opposition.**

Thank you. **Finally,** I call on ..... the **captain of the proposition.**

Now the adjudicators will leave the room to tot up their marks and we will open the discussion to the floor.

Ask if anyone has any comments or questions for either team. All these comments and questions should be addressed to you, the chair. Please encourage audience members to offer comments or ask questions while the adjudicators are away. Respect for both teams is to be maintained at all times so any negative or unfair comments should not be tolerated and should be dealt with immediately.

Remember – give both teams equal time to answer questions or comments.

PRIMARY DEBATES

Time Keeper's Sheet



- Each speaker has 3 minutes to present their arguments.
- Sound the bell (or tap the glass with your pen!) at two minutes and thirty seconds (02.30) and again at two minutes fifty seconds (02.50).
- The speaker should then wind up his/her speech and return to his / her seat.
- When a speaker goes over 3 minutes then **1 point** should be deducted from that team's total points for every minute they go over time.
- Fill in speech-timings on the grid below, then add up time penalties.

PROPOSITION	TIME (00.00)
Captain	
Speaker 2	
Speaker 3	
Captain (2nd Speech)	
TOTAL points deducted	

OPPOSITION	TIME (00.00)
Captain	
Speaker 2	
Speaker 3	
Captain (2nd Speech)	
TOTAL points deducted	

REMEMBER:

Give this time sheet to one of the adjudicators before they leave the room to add up their marks.

ATECI

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SO WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

LET'S DEBATE IT



Participating teacher education centres include:

Limerick Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais Luimnigh

DRUMCONDRA EDUCATION CENTRE

West Cork Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais Iarthar Chorcaí

Dublin West Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais Bhaile Átha Cliath Thiar

Laois Education Centre

Sligo Education Centre

CESC
Cork Education Support Centre

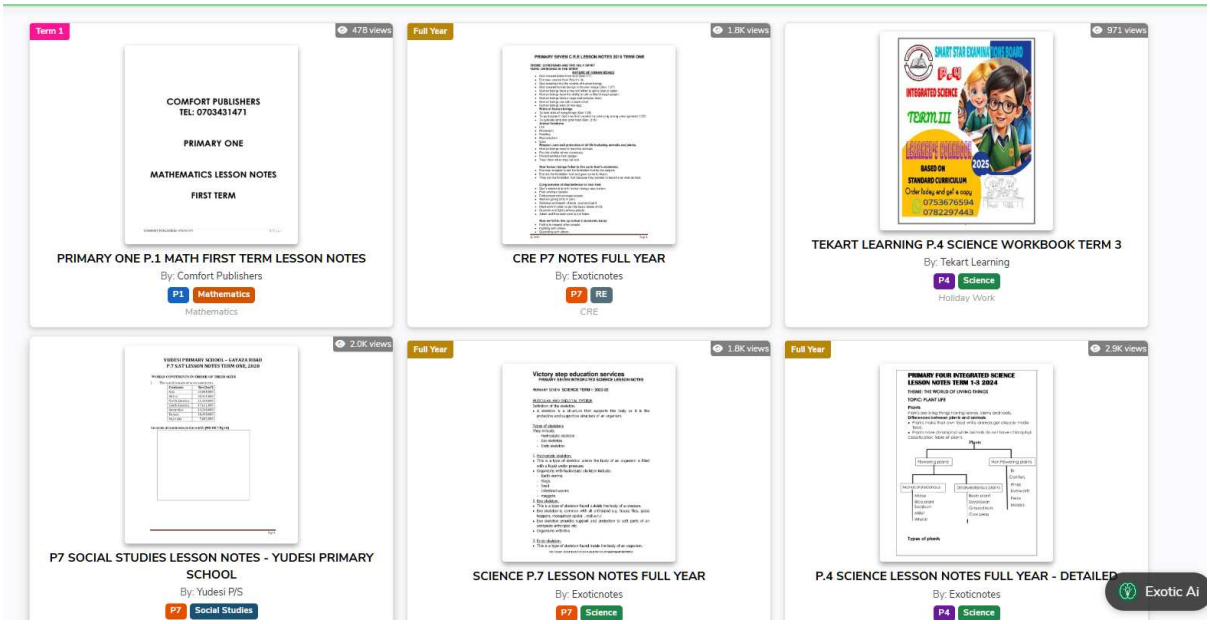
Kilkenny Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais Chill Chainnigh

Education Centre

Blackrock Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais na Carraige Duibhe

Waterford Teachers' Centre
Ionad Múinteoirí Phort Láirge

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