







The Elephant in the Room:

A climate debate game about perspective, complexity, and curiosity

[2 Players | 30+ minutes | 13+ years old]

Print & Play Version 2.0 (2025)

Designed by Jennifer Kumer (Selkie Educational Foundation) for **Climate for All**

Special thanks to Anja Lotte Kastelic, Antonios Triantafyllakis, Bruno Setola, Jana Ramanova

Climate for All empowers youth globally to tackle climate change through engaging, game-based sustainability education.

Learn more about Climate for All at: https://climate4all.org/





Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International

Co-funded by the European Union: Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Quick Setup Checklist

☐ Print & cut all cards (5 decks total, 89 Cards)	
☐ Organise decks by color/type	
☐ Print or display Debate Etiquette and Cheatsheet	
Optional: timer, coin, pens, paper, tokens for voting	



Introduction to the Game

The Elephant in the Room is a fast-paced and thought-provoking debate game about climate change. It invites players to step into different roles and perspectives to explore some of the most pressing—and often polarising—climate topics of our time.

Unlike traditional debate formats, which often focus on winning or convincing others of your personal opinion, this game emphasises curiosity over competition. Players are encouraged to challenge ideas, not each other, and to engage with unfamiliar viewpoints rather than defend their own.

Each round offers a chance to build arguments, speak from new perspectives, and reflect on the deeper tensions within climate conversations. The game is inspired by the spirit of philia sophia—the love of wisdom—where the goal is not to be right, but to understand more fully.

Whether you're new to debating or a seasoned speaker, this game offers a creative and supportive space to explore climate issues together—one bold question at a time.

Target Audience

- Designed for ages 13 and up (secondary school, youth, and adults)
- Ideal for educators, youth workers, and facilitators in formal or non-formal learning settings
- Suitable for classrooms, youth groups, climate workshops, or informal learning events
- Great for groups with diverse knowledge levels—no prior climate or debate experience needed
- Encourages both introverts and extroverts to participate through roleplay and structured turns

- Especially effective in contexts where **critical thinking**, **empathy**, **and communication** are learning goals
- Flexible enough for **short 30-minute sessions** or **multi-round workshops**

Game Contents

- **20 Debate Topic Cards** (yellow) Each card presents a bold climate statement to agree or disagree with
- 20 Role Cards (purple) Broad, relatable identities from different walks of life
- **30 Perspective Cards** (green) Internal mindsets or beliefs to influence how you argue
- **15 Win Condition Cards (3 Sets)** *(green)* Used at the end of each round to determine the winner, based on hidden criteria revealed after the debate. Adds surprise, reflection, and a playful twist to each round.
- 4 Instruction Cards Includes a debate round cheat sheet, debate etiquette guide, an overview of the game, card types, and background information about the Climate for All project.

Optional: timer (hourglass or phone) and notepads

M How to Play

Step 1: Draw & Choose

- Draw 1 **Debate Topic Card** and place it face up in the center.
- Draw 1 **Win Condition Card**, but keep it face down—you won't reveal it until after the debate.

- Each player draws 2 Role Cards and 3 Perspective Cards.
- From these, choose 1 **Role Card** and 1 **Perspective Card** to guide your argument this round. (Role = who you are; Perspective = the lens you see the debate topic from)

Not feeling inspired? You can return your cards and redraw them once. Discard all Role and Perspective cards and draw a new set.

Step 2: Prep (1 minute)

- Begin the round by reading the **Debate Etiquette card** aloud to set the tone for respectful and thoughtful dialogue.
- Each player takes 1 minute to prepare their argument based on the **Debate Topic**, **Role**, and **Perspective**.

Tip: You are not arguing what you believe in real life. Embrace the character and point of view you've drawn!

Switch positions each round so players can argue both "Agree" and "Disagree" positions throughout the game.

Step 3: Debate (© 5 minutes)

Use the **Debate Cheatsheet** (found on the back of the instruction card) to guide the structure of the round. A typical format might be:

- 1. **Opening Statements** Each player has 1 minute to present their argument.
- 2. **Rebuttals** Players take 30 seconds each to respond to one another.
- 3. Closing Statements Each player gets 30 seconds to wrap up their points.

Facilitators or observers can keep time, or you can use a timer to help stay on track.

Step 4: Reveal (*) 1 minute)

After the debate, flip and read the **Win Condition Card** aloud. This hidden card determines what the round will be judged on.

There are **5 possible win conditions**:

- **The Nuance Award** For the most well-rounded and thoughtful argument
- Sp. The Role Master For the most convincing embodiment of their Role and Perspective
- **The Self-Challenger** For the player who shifted their own thinking the most
- **The Mind-Opener** For the player who most challenged or expanded the other's thinking
- P The Communicator For the clearest and most persuasive communicator

Together, discuss who best fulfilled the revealed win condition. The winner **keeps the** card as a point.

After each round:

- Return all used Cards to their decks and reshuffle.
- Each player draws a new hand and plays a new character with a new perspective.

This keeps the game fresh and challenges players to think from different angles.

How Many Rounds?

You can decide based on time or goals. A typical game lasts:

- Short game: First to collect 3 unique Win Condition Cards
- Long game: First to collect all 5 unique win types
- Or simply play a set number of rounds (e.g. 3–5) followed by group reflection.

The game is flexible—play one powerful round or a full session!

Thow to Win the Game

- Short Game: First player to collect 3 different Win Condition Cards wins.
- Long Game: First player to collect all 5 unique types of Win Conditions wins.

Players can only score points for **unique** Win Conditions. They don't score a point if they win a round but already hold that card.

You can also play open-ended rounds and use the game as a tool for discussion and reflection rather than competition.

Adjusting the Difficulty Level

You can easily tailor the difficulty and pace of the game by changing **how many sets** of **Win Condition Cards** are in play. The number of sets affects how often players draw unique win types versus repeat ones, and only unique wins count toward scoring.

Faster Game (1 Set – 5 Win Condition Cards Total)

- Only one of each win condition exists.
- Makes each round more high-stakes and high-reward.
- Ideal for quick games or tight timeframes (e.g., short workshops or tiebreaker rounds).

Standard Play (2 Sets of Win Conditions – 10 Win Condition Cards Total)

- This default setup provides a balanced mix of challenge and momentum.
- Drawing duplicates is possible, but players will regularly gain new win types.
- Ideal for casual group play or first-time players.

Challenger Mode (3 Sets – 15 Win Condition Cards Total)

- Increases the pool of Win Condition Cards.
- Makes it more likely that players will draw repeat win types (which don't score points).
- Great for longer games, larger groups, or players who enjoy added challenge and strategy.
- Reminder: Players can only score points for unique Win Conditions. They don't score a point if they win a round but already hold that card.

🚔 How the Print & Play Version Works

This Print & Play version of *The Elephant in the Room* gives you everything you need to run the game in classrooms, workshops, or casual group settings—no box required!

What You'll Need

- Access to a colour printer
- A4 or US Letter paper (preferably thick paper or cardstock for durability)
- Scissors or paper cutter

(Optional) Card sleeves or a laminator for extended use

What to Do:

- 1. **Download the full Print & Play PDF** (last page of the document).
- 2. Print the cards: We recommend printing in color on thick paper or cardstock for durability. If you're inexperienced with double-sided printing, we recommend printing single-sided, then either glue them together or sleeve the cards. The card size is Standard Poker Size: 63 x 88 mm.
- 3. Cut each sheet of cards using the crop marks.
- 4. **Sort the decks** (total 89 cards) into 5 piles:
 - Debate Topic Cards (yellow) x20 cards
 - Role Cards (purple) x20 cards
 - Perspective Cards (green) x30 cards
 - Win Condition Cards (green 3 sets) x15 cards
 - Instruction Cards (pink) x4 cards
- 5. Optional: Grab a coin (or use rock, paper, scissors) for assigning sides.

Classroom Mode & Facilitator Tips

The Elephant in the Room is easily adaptable for classrooms, workshops, or large youth groups. Below is a suggested format for running the game with 10-30 participants, plus tips to help facilitators guide meaningful, respectful, and engaging debate sessions.

Start with Icebreakers (Optional but Recommended)

Before diving into the game, warm up your group with one or both of these activities to build confidence, loosen tension, and prepare students to express themselves.

1. Agree / Disagree Corners

Designate corners of the room as Agree, Disagree, and Neutral. Read out fun or climate-themed statements (e.g. "Every city should be car-free"), and have students move to the side of the room that reflects their opinion. Invite a few to explain why.

Helps participants practice taking a stance and hearing other perspectives.

2. Role Shuffle

Hand out random Role Cards from the game. Ask playful questions like:

- "What would your character eat for breakfast?"
- "What's their biggest fear?"
- "What do they wish people understood about them?"

Students answer in character in pairs or small groups.

Encourages empathy, creativity, and comfort with roleplay before debating.

Classroom Mode (Team Play)

1. Form Teams

Divide players into teams of 2 - 4 people. Each team draws:

- 2 Role Cards
- 3 Perspective Cards
- Teams must choose 1 role and 1 perspective card as a group. The team shares
 one role and one mindset to build their case.

You can choose to have an even number of groups debating in parallel by giving each group a selection of **Role**, **Perspective**, **and Topic Cards**. Alternatively, choose to feature only two teams and their debate and assign the role of observers/jury to the remainder of the group.

2. Assign Sides

After creating an even number of teams, flip a coin or assign one team to argue **Agree** and the other **Disagree**.

3. Preparation Time (© 3-5 minutes)

Players within the same team should collaborate to build their argument, using their role and perspective as inspiration. Encourage note-taking or assigning speaking roles.

4. Debate Format

One speaker per team presents their argument (1–2 minutes each). Optional rebuttals or follow-ups can be added for extra depth.

5. Reveal & Vote

Flip the hidden **Win Condition Card**. The rest of the group (or a jury panel) votes on which team best fulfilled the win condition. Points only count for unique win conditions.

Facilitator Tips

• Set the tone with Debate Etiquette

Start each session by reading the Debate Etiquette Card aloud. It helps establish a shared understanding of respectful dialogue, listening, and the spirit of *philia* sophia—curiosity over competition.

• Support creative role engagement

Encourage students to step into their role and perspective with imagination. Let them exaggerate, question, or challenge the role to make it their own. There's no "right" way to play a character.

• Remind them it's not about being right

Many young people associate debating with "winning." Reinforce that this game is about exploring complexity, hearing other views, and becoming more flexible thinkers—not defending personal beliefs.

Keep the flow structured

Use the **Debate Cheatsheet** and timers to keep debates moving. This helps reduce awkward pauses and keeps energy levels high, especially for beginners.

Debrief meaningfully

After each round or at the end of the session, ask reflection questions such as:

- What did you learn from seeing a different perspective?
- o Did your thinking shift during the debate?
- What real-life parallels did you notice in the arguments?

Adapt to your group's needs

Use simpler debate topics for younger players or shorter rounds for tight timeframes. The game is flexible—play one impactful round or run a multi-round challenge depending on your goals.

Note on Timing & Accessibility

The suggested time limits (e.g., 1 minute prep, 5-minute debate) are just a guide and can be adapted to suit the group. Feel free to adjust the pace to make the game more accessible—for example, allowing more prep or speaking time for younger players, language learners, or anyone with cognitive, speech, or processing differences. The goal is meaningful participation, not speed, so take the time your players need to feel confident and included.

Ready to spark climate conversations? Print, play, and step into the debate. 🐘 🌍



Download from the Climate for All Community

Contact: Jennifer Kumer / jennkumer@gmail.com