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Arguing for Our Lives: A User's Guide to Constructive Dialog

Robert Jensen

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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."—**Henry Giroux**, author of *Twilight of the Social: Resurgent Politics in the Age of Disposability* (Paradigm, 2012)

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