**Big 4 Whiteboarding**

Instructions: Groups will be provided with a 2 x 3 foot whiteboard and sufficient dry-erase markers to organize information. The goal of this activity is to take a complex subject (in this case, the pros and cons of biomass to biofuel technology) and condense it to a small number of manageable big ideas. Students should be split into their debate groups (usually 4 students) and allowed to spend some time researching the topic. As they come across what they think are big ideas, they should represent them on their whiteboard. Representations can be pictures or other visual displays, too – it doesn’t have to be just words. Some examples of “pro” ideas might be:

* Uses waste material
* Allows return of carbon from the atmosphere through photosynthesis

Some examples of “cons” might be

* The process is overly expensive and inefficient
* Planting crops for biofuels might increase world hunger, since that land wouldn’t be available for food crops.

After groups have their big ideas, they should do a “circle seminar.” Have students turn their whiteboards toward the center of the room, so all can see. Groups take turns presenting what their big ideas are, and answering any questions other groups might have. This allows them to do a “pre-writing” of what their debate briefs might look like, while also giving them a preview of what the opposing side thinks, as well. Teachers should take care to encourage a positive, but questioning atmosphere, while keeping students focused on the task at hand.