



*Implications of Political Issues
High School Level (2012)*

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

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Implications of Political Issues

Overview

In this lesson students research and analyze the implications of political issues, and write persuasive letters to Representatives, in U.S. Congress or State Legislature.

Big Idea

American Principles, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.

Essential Questions for Students

- What conflicts exist between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy?
- What should be the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What should be the balance between individual rights and the common good?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community, in the nation, and the world?
- What makes a valid and effective persuasive argument?
- How can you participate in the democratic process to influence local, domestic and foreign policy?

Outcomes

- Students will evaluate current political issues
- Students will write persuasive letters to Representatives arguing for or against an issue
- Students will participate effectively as part of a research team
- Students will write arguments to support their analysis of an issue
- Students will use valid reasoning and will supply sufficient evidence

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards:](#)
 - What Is Government and What Should it Do? (all standards)
 - What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy? (all standards)
 - What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?
 - Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals
 - Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts:](#)

- English Language Arts: Reading, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (RI9-10.9, RI11-12.7 and 8))
- English Language Arts: Speaking — Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, (SL9-19.1, SL9-10.4, SL11-12.1, SL11-12.4)
- English Language Arts: Writing, Text Types and Purposes (W9-10.1, W11-12.1)

Community Connections

- Research local issues and initiatives
- Invite members of the community who represent both sides of the issues to speak to class

Preparation

- Review recommended Web Resources
- Provide students with Web access

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set (one class period)

Brainstorm — First, ask students to generate categories for major political issues that pertain to the current election. Facilitate discussion towards key categories such as:

- Fiscal Policy
- Social Policy
- Political Policy
- Energy Policy
- Foreign Policy — National Defense

Second, have students brainstorm issues that are important to them that fall within each category. For example,

- Fiscal Policy (national debt, youth unemployment rates, etc.)
- Social Policy (universal healthcare, education initiatives, etc)
- Political Policy (campaign finance reform, voter registration initiatives, etc.)
- Energy Policy (renewable energy, environmental issues, etc.)
- And so on..

Guided Instruction (one class period)

Modeling — Using a student-generated issue, model how to research multiple sides of the issue on the Web and/or using other resources. Remind students to evaluate sources. What makes a source reliable?

Provide students with the Handout and demonstrate completing some of the items as well as the structure of the persuasive letter.

Have students self-select small groups or pairs based on issue that is most important to them. Share with students that the assignment will have two parts: small group work to research an issue, followed by individual persuasive letters to their Representatives.

Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)

Research & Analysis — Student pairs or small groups use the recommended web resources and/or teacher selected resources to complete their research, as detailed in the Handout.

Independent Learning (one to two class periods)

Persuasive Letter to Representative — Students write a persuasive letter about the issue, as detailed in the Handout.

Student Assessment

Informally assess students as they research. Review student persuasive letters. Do letters show evidence of understanding of the issues and essential questions? Does letters substantiate their arguments with reasoning and evidence?

Extension Activities — Service Learning Opportunities

- Investigate citizens who are affected by the researched issues, and volunteer to help them
- Create a wiki page or student blog to inform community about the issues.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

Provide students with additional graphic organizers for note taking, and/or with some of the information pre-filled.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining the researched issues
- Ask students to poll their parents on the issues. Compare and contrast views to student views

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Political Issues](#)