

# Pre-Forum Lesson Plan: Connecting International Events with Values and History

The pre-forum lesson is the opportunity to involve the entire class in the Capitol Forum day. While only four or five students go to the forum itself, they go as representatives of their classmates. It is therefore necessary for the whole class to be familiar with the global themes of the forum and with the ways in which international issues are discussed there.

An essential part of this lesson is a “Class Statement” written by the class articulating its views on the international issues with which it is most concerned. The class will submit its Class Statement on the Choices website. Students thus have a “public” forum for voicing their concerns and can compare their interests with those of other students in the state and in other Capitol Forum states.

Students create a visual representation of their interests and concerns as they relate to the global themes in the form of a poster. This poster is presented by their classmates at the forum.

The pre-forum lesson is completed two weeks prior to the Capitol Forum in the spring.

## Lesson Plan

### Objectives—Students will:

- Examine a variety of current topics and concerns on the international agenda.
- Relate these topics and concerns to the global themes of this program.
- Using the issues and themes, make connections between historical and current international issues.
- Write a Class Statement articulating their concerns, to be posted on the Choices website.
- Develop a creative visual representation of their class’s top international interests.

### Handouts

- Handout 1: Connecting International Issues with Values and History
- Handout 2: Poster Guidelines

### Homework

1. Students review the global themes (international conflict, immigration, trade, the global environment, and proliferation) examined during the year/semester before assigning the homework that precedes this lesson. In this homework assignment and class discussion to follow, students use their knowledge of these themes to consider current international issues.
2. Students use newspapers and other current events resources to examine a range of international events and issues. Choices has a variety of resources related to the four global themes of the forum posted on its website, [www.choices.edu](http://www.choices.edu), which students may find useful. Each student should come to class prepared to report on at least two different current international issues. Students should use Handout 1 to prepare their report and to help guide their class discussion. (*The number of issues brought to class by each student, as well as the format for preparing the reports, can be revised as the teacher sees fit for his/her particular class needs.*)

### In the Classroom

1. A list is generated of the different international events and issues that students examined for homework. Students should add to their list of issues at this time. (*Various procedures can be used. For example, students could work in groups of two or three to pool the results of their homework notes and then share the group’s summaries with the class as a whole. A general class list of significant events or issues would then be generated to complete the rest of the class work. Alternatively, you*

*could tack easel paper around the room with headings based upon each of the global themes. Students could volunteer which of the events or issues they examined for homework seemed to relate to each global theme. Whatever format you choose, it should result in a collection of students' issues creating a common base for further discussion.)*

2. Discussion of the students' issues should continue using the following questions.
  - On which of these issues is the U.S. acting?
  - On which issues is the U.S. not acting in a significant way? Why?
  - What values appear to be shaping U.S. policy?
  - Do you agree with these values?
  - Are there values and interests important to you that are not reflected in U.S. policy?
  - Which issues should be of greatest concern to the American public?
  - Which issues are of greatest concern to you as an individual?

*NOTE: Students need to clearly differentiate between issues/events and values in order to complete this exercise in a meaningful way. You may find it useful to use the exercise, "Considering the Role of Values in Public Policy," as an introduction/refreshers. A copy is included in Chapter 4: Additional Resources.*

3. As a group, students in the class should identify their top concerns using the following questions to help guide their decisions.
  - Of the issues raised in the previous discussion, which ones are of most concern to the class? Why?
  - What do students in the class believe the U.S. should do on these issues?
  - What values do your students feel are reflected in these issues?
  - What values are reflected in their policy recommendations?

- Do the students think that their values are shared by the country as a whole?

4. At the conclusion of the discussion (which could range from one to several days, depending upon the course, class, etc.), the class should reach consensus about its top international concerns, e.g., destruction of rain forests. Students should be able to articulate how these concerns reflect certain values, e.g., preserving earth's resources versus national sovereignty and economic development.

Students should also relate their issues of interest to one or more of the global themes of immigration, trade, environment, terrorism, and proliferation. For example, if your students are concerned about global warming and pollution from fossil fuel emissions, encourage them to make connections to the themes of trade and conflict: How could a change in America's oil consumption affect our trade relationships with oil-producing nations? With developing nations? If America were less dependent on foreign oil, how might our foreign policy toward the Middle East change? The aim is to get students to think beyond the headlines and to see connections among various issues.

*NOTE: Students need not come to an agreed position on the issues they discuss. They may even agree to disagree about which issues are most important. If this is the case, the class's "consensus" can involve identifying the reasons for their disagreement, exploring how their different values and priorities influence their policy views.*

## **Writing a Class Statement**

Once students have reached consensus on the issues of concern to the class, the class should write a "Class Statement" articulating its concerns, values, and analysis in terms of the global themes. In other words, students are putting into writing the outcome of the discussion outlined above. You may wish to designate a few students as "reporters" who together can synthesize the class discussion into the *one-half to one-page* Class Statement.

These statements are posted on the Capitol Forum section of the Choices website at [www.choices.edu](http://www.choices.edu) two weeks before the forum day. This is a special area for submitting the Class Statements. It asks the class to answer several questions about its views and then provides space for further explanation.

### **Sharing Class Statements**

The Class Statement from each participating class is posted on the website, arranged by state and listed by school. This gives students an opportunity to compare their concerns and views with those of other students in their state and in other Capitol Forum states. A printed copy of the Class Statements is presented to each of the public officials participating in the discussion on the Capitol Forum day, giving them a written record of students' concerns.

### **Creating Posters**

The poster is thought of as a visual expression of the class statement. A group of students should create a poster which communicates the class's concerns and values. In order to involve as many students as possible, these students should not be the same students who attend the Capitol Forum. Those

attending the forum, however, do need to be prepared to present and explain the poster. See Handout 2: Poster Guidelines for details.

Student posters should:

- Express the current international concerns of the students in a creative visual statement.
- Show how these concerns relate to the global themes to be addressed at the forum.
- Reflect the values at stake in these international concerns.
- Present the students' opinions on the values that they believe should shape U.S. policy.
- Reflect serious analysis and expression of careful student reflection on values and priorities in U.S. foreign policy.

Student posters should not:

- Resemble a bulletin board of current events articles.
- Limit in any way students' creativity in expressing themselves.

Any format on the poster is acceptable if it:

- Conveys the students' concerns,
- Demonstrates their deeper understanding of the values underlying these concerns, and
- Shows how these concerns relate to the issues they have been discussing.

# Handout 1: Connecting International Issues with Values and History

You have been assigned to come to class prepared to talk about one or more international issues that are of interest or concern to you. In order to be ready for class discussion, please answer the following questions about your issue. If you have more than one issue to discuss, complete a separate sheet for each one.

1. What current international issue concerns or interests you?
2. What interests you about this issue?
3. What countries or areas of the world are involved or affected by this issue?
4. What is the current U.S. policy or view on this issue?
5. What values are at the foundation of the debate on this issue?
6. How does this issue relate to one or more of the global themes (terrorism, environment, immigration, trade, proliferation)?
7. How does this issue relate to the history of the countries or areas involved? Is it similar to any other historical events elsewhere in the world?

## Handout 2: Poster Guidelines

As a class you will receive a tri-fold display board to use for your class poster. These boards will be displayed on table tops during the forum. Following the forum, they will be hung for public display. The following suggestions are made to ensure that we can display each project easily and fairly.

- The panels will not be returned. Please make sure that all materials used are considered disposable—i.e., no family heirloom photos.
- The panels need to fold out to stand on tables during the Forum. Please make sure when constructing the posters that the folds still close enough to allow the panel to stand without additional support.
- Your school's name should appear somewhere on the front of the panel.
- On separate sheet(s) please include any written materials (essays, quotations, explanatory writing) that you feel will help viewers understand your visual presentation.

### Checklist for Completed Posters

1. International concerns of students in the class are clearly portrayed. \_\_\_\_\_
2. These concerns are related to some (or all) of the global themes. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Underlying values associated with these concerns are clearly portrayed. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Values that students have agreed should shape foreign policy are also shown. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Final product is creative. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Each student attending the Forum knows exactly what he/she is contributing to the poster presentation on the day of the Forum. \_\_\_\_\_

*NOTE: Your creativity need not end with the completion of the poster itself. Think also about the manner in which your class representatives will present your class poster to the other students at the forum.*