

Structure and Approach of Choices Units

There are two kinds of units—those that are shaped around an unresolved current issue and those that are shaped around a historical turning point. Both involve students in a dynamic conversation between the past and the present. In each, the centerpiece of the unit is a framework of divergent views (or options) and each includes readings and student-centered lesson plans.

Current Issues Units

Current issues units explore multiple perspectives on current, contested international issues.

Introducing the Background: Each unit provides readings and lessons that engage students in exploration of the history that forms the foundation of the issues under consideration today. This historical foundation prepares students to analyze a range of perspectives and then to deliberate about possible approaches to contentious policy issues.

Exploring Policy Alternatives: At the core of each unit are divergent policy options that challenge students to consider multiple perspectives. Students understand and analyze the options through a role-play activity and the dialogue that follows.

Role-play: In groups, students explore their assigned options and plan short presentations for a role-play. The setting of the role-play varies and may be a Congressional hearing, a meeting of the National Security Council, or an election campaign forum.

Deliberation: After the options have been presented and students clearly understand the differences among them, students analyze together the merits and trade-offs of each option, explore shared concerns as well as conflicting values, interests, and priorities, and begin to articulate their own views.

Exercising Citizenship: Armed with fresh insights from the role-play and the deliberation with classmates, students articulate original, coherent policy options that reflect their own values and goals. Students' views can be expressed in letters to Congress or the White House, editorials for the school or community newspaper, persuasive speeches, or visual presentations.

Historical Turning Point Units

Historical turning points units explore choices that confronted people at critical moments in history.

Introducing the Background: Each unit provides students with extensive information about the history leading up to the moment under consideration. This historical foundation prepares students to step into a moment in history to understand the competing and highly contested views of those living at the time.

Exploring the Historical Moment: At the core of each historical unit are options that were considered at a turning point in history. Students understand and analyze the options through a role-play activity and the dialogue that follows.

Role-play: In groups, students explore their assigned options and plan short presentations for a role-play. The setting of the role-play is the same as it was during the actual event. Students may be role-playing a meeting of the National Security Council, a town gathering, or a Senate debate.

Historical Debate: Taking into account the conditions of the day, student groups defend their assigned policy options and, in turn, are challenged with questions from their classmates playing the role of “decisionmakers” at the time. The ensuing debate demands analysis and evaluation of the conflicting values, interests, and priorities reflected in the options.

Making Connections: The final reading presents the outcome of the debate and reviews subsequent events. Students analyze the decisions made and reflect on the significance of those decisions for our world today.