

The Second Amendment: An Ongoing Debate

PURPOSE

To engage in debate and simulation of the operations of the legislative branch regarding the right to bear arms.

GRADE LEVELS

Middle School
High School

CONTENT AREAS

Social Studies

TIME

2-3 class periods (adapt for different grade levels)

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn vocabulary and interpret the language of an historical document.
- Students will engage in persuasive speaking through debate.
- Students will model the legislative process of the U.S. government.

STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

Social Sciences State Goals 14A, 14D, 14F, 18C

LEARNING STYLES

Verbal/Linguistic
Interpersonal
Intrapersonal
Kinesthetic

MATERIALS

I Have Who Has Vocabulary Game
Second Amendment Paraphrase Worksheet
Debate Research Worksheet
Debate Rules
Secret Ballot

VOCABULARY

Gun Control
Gun Rights
Advocate
Second Amendment
Congress
House and Senate
Militia

ASSESSMENT

Debate (informal and formal)

ACTIVITIES

Anticipatory Set

- Pass out scrap paper and have students write whether or not they believe individuals should have the right to own and carry a gun. For accountability and to ensure students are invested, ask them to write one sentence about why they chose the position they did.
- Allow a few students to share their responses and then collect the scraps and tally the results.

- Tell students that the issue of gun rights is a hotly debated topic today and that over the next few class periods they will be preparing their arguments to debate their classmates on the issue.

Lesson:

- **Vocabulary Practice:** Before beginning the debate research, students will need to be familiar with some key terms regarding the Second Amendment and the legislative process.
 - If your class is already familiar with these terms, you can skip right to the debate activity or simply use the following activity as a brief review.
 - For students who are less familiar with these terms, you may want to devote a class period to learning these using the **I Have Who Has Vocabulary Game** (specific instructions can be found in the Resource section below)
 - Also review with students: the *U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, amendments, the branches of government, and the process of the legislative branch* with regard to bills, laws, and amendments.
- **Debate Preparation:** Remind students of the question you posed about the rights of individuals to bear arms and verbally test them to see if they remember which amendment in the Bill of Rights explains this right.
 - Tell students that the debate begins with interpreting the language of the Second Amendment written so many years ago. Pass out copies of the **Second Amendment Paraphrase Worksheet** and allow students a few minutes to work in groups to paraphrase the amendment. Share and check for understanding.
 - Split students into two groups called “**Advocates of Gun Rights**” and “**Advocates of Gun Control.**” Let students choose their own sides of the argument unless it is overwhelmingly uneven, in which case you should ask select students to research and debate for a side that they may not necessarily personally agree with.
 - Provide students with the **Debate Research Worksheet** and allow them time to conduct their research. Depending on your class, you may wish to print off materials in advance, assign the research as homework, or schedule a class period in the library or computer lab.
- **Debate Day:** Write or post the list of **Debate Rules** and review them as a class. Give students about five minutes to meet with those advocating the same viewpoint to discuss their research and solidify their argument. Allowing more than five minutes will give students who have not completed their homework time to copy from someone else so be aware of this.
 - The students will simulate a modern debate in Congress. A motion has been introduced in the House to pass a new amendment to repeal the Second Amendment. Assign one student to be Speaker of the House and another to be timekeeper. Tell students that their goal is to convince some of the people on the other side to change their minds because they need a 2/3 vote to add the amendment.
 - Allow students to debate for twenty minutes, adhering to the rules. With five minutes left, each side should have a representative share a closing statement of no longer than one minute.
 - Finally, every student should vote secretly, using the **Secret Ballot** and the teacher should tally the votes in front of the class. If 2/3 of the class voted for the amendment, it goes on to the Senate!

Debrief/Assessment:

- Debrief by asking students what made the debate successful and what obstacles they encountered. Did anyone change their minds? If so, why? Do you feel differently about this topic than you did before you began your research? How?
- Assessment should be informal and ongoing based on student participation in the debate, but collecting the **Debate Research Worksheet** and grading for completion and effort will ensure that students who are not comfortable speaking out in class are still given credit for the work.
- See the **Suggestions for Extension Activities** section below for additional ideas for assessment.

Resources:

What is “I Have, Who Has?”

“I Have, Who Has?” is a chain-drill game that students can play to practice new vocabulary, terms, and skills.

To prepare:

- Print out the **I Have Who Has Vocabulary** cards. There will be 2 pages, with four cards on each page.
- Cut each page into four sections so that each section has a card that says “I Have” above one that says “Who Has?” The first card should be “I Have the first card” with “Who has the belief that the U.S. needs stricter firearm laws, including tougher background checks?” underneath it. Fold it and tape or staple this card so that the “Who has” statement is on the back of the “I have” one.
- Since there are only 8 vocabulary cards in this activity, you will want to make multiple copies and split students into groups of about 8 to complete the exercise. Alternatively, you can have students in the class participate while the rest of the class watches and listens, rotating after each round.
- Be sure to print off an extra copy without cutting for teacher resource so you can move about the room and make corrections.

When you are ready to do the activity:

- Mix up the cards, but keep the first card (*I Have the First Card*) on top, so you know who will be starting the game. Let that student know he/she is the start.
- Give each student in the group one card (some may have two if there are less than 8 people in the group) and tell them to look at the side that says “I have...”
- Students should listen for the definition that describes the term on their card and respond by reading their card aloud.
- When the student has finished reading the correct “I have” statement, he/she should flip over the card and read the “Who Has” statement to continue to chain.
- **Example:**
 - Student 1: **I have** the first card. **Who Has** the belief that the U.S. needs stricter firearm laws, including tougher background checks?
 - Student 2: **I have** Gun Control. **Who Has** the belief that any law to interfere with the use and sale of firearms is a violation of American Rights?
 - Student 3: **I have** Gun Rights. **Who Has** a person or group who argues for a cause...” and so on.
- Once the chain gets back to the first card, shuffle and redistribute the cards and repeat the activity until all participants feel confident with the information learned or reviewed through the exercise. It can be fun to try to get faster and faster at the activity and you may even choose to time students.

Suggestions for Extension Activities:

1. Use our resources at www.ichv.org to have students write letters to their representatives regarding current measures and laws concerning guns and gun violence.
2. Practice persuasive writing by having students write a newspaper editorial defending or criticizing the decision the class debate and vote arrived at.
3. Introduce the **Student Voices Contest** as a way for students to voice their opinion on gun violence.