

A Look at U.S and Canadian Approaches to Individual Liberties

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Description:

This lesson focuses on comparing and contrasting the governing policies of Canadian and the U.S. in regards to social issues. These include social welfare and civic responsibility issues as well as personal liberty topics such as gay marriage and the decriminalization of marijuana. Students will exercise research, identification, analytical and evaluation skills when presented with the information and activities within this lesson. The lesson strives to combine teaching of broader governmental policies while also considering personal individual liberties and freedoms. Students should be well able to identify with the latter on a more personal level while still gaining a working knowledge of the larger system. This lesson also briefly touches on historical events to give illustration to the effects of the policies held by each nation's government.

Grade Levels:

Senior – Grades 11-12

Subjects:

Social Studies/Government/World History

Duration:

Two or more 55-minute lessons that can be extended.

Goal:

The goal is to compare the governance of social policy in the U.S. and Canada with consideration to the different structures of government. A comparison of how these policies impact the population will also be considered to encourage formulation of student opinions, policy analyses, and classroom discussion of topics.

Objectives:

Students will:

- brainstorm issues of interest & select approximately 6 topics to be examined and discussed by the class
- select an intriguing issue and share a teacher-approved article concerning the topic with the class
- read several brief articles on the topic (4-5 based on number of others who also selected the topic)
- identify differences between the governmental policies and any impacts such policies have had on people
- analyze the effectiveness of federal policies in regards to social wellness and overall happiness
- serve as topic specialist in classroom discussion and learn about other issues from other topic specialists
- write a 5-8 paragraph personal essay on the topic that offers sound reasoning and offers concrete support

Standards:

This lesson meets NCSS standards in terms of the following strands for teaching: Individual Development and Identity; Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Power, Authority, and Governance; Civic Ideals and Practices. It also develops students' research, analytical and evaluation skills in response to the core content.

Background Information:

Before this lesson, students will have reviewed how legislation is passed in the US and be given an introduction to how the parliamentary system in Canada works. Students will also recognize how the different national "mottos" are reflected in governmental stances regarding social issues. [Canada's motto is "Peace, Order and Good

Government”; US motto is “Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness”.] The days before this lesson, a library research day should be provided so that students can briefly research a social issue and select a reading.

Materials:

4-6 short articles per topic gathered by students that offer either a Canadian or American perspective.

Procedures:

1. On their own, students will research a social issue that interests them within either country and compare that to the policy of the other country and briefly summarize their research and opinion for a class discussion;
2. Students will come prepared to class with this article(s), and then read others’ submissions silently to gain further background and perspective on the topic;
3. After adequate time for reading has passed, an in-class discussion will be held with 10-minutes allowed per topic. Students will be asked to write notes and record citations offered. This will likely carry over to a second day. Students will be encouraged to focus on personal views and opinions as well as how the policies have affected the people (or stereotypes) of each nation.
4. Students will then convert the discussion summary and notes taken into a draft for a 5-8 paragraph personal essay on the topic. The usual writing process will be required and the final copy due after adequate time has been allotted for the assignment.

Assessment:

Students will receive a grade from the teacher based on their participation in the discussion and the quality of analysis expressed in their research summary. The essay will also be graded with greater value using a rubric that reflects contributions to the writing process and the caliber of content, expression/style and structure

Possible Extension/Wrap-up:

Other classes might want to explore other world issues (like global warming or the war in Iraq) and compare the US-Canada’s governmental policies or design a culminating project that reflects such broader global topics.