

Comparative Governments: Canada and the United States

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Description:

This project involves an in-depth comparison between the Canadian and US federal governments.

Grade Level:

Middle or High School

Subjects:

Government or U.S. History

Duration:

One semester long (considerable length) project; however, it can be a shorter unit. The teacher might be able to dovetail a couple of similar debates, proposals, etc., currently taking place.

Goal:

Students will learn the considerable differences between the two systems and be able to describe the advantages and disadvantages of each with some precise details by the end of the unit.

Materials:

Students will be provided with pp. 41-45 of *Canada: Northern Neighbor (Second Edition)* for a brief and effective comparison between the two systems. The bulk of the remaining materials necessary for completion of the unit will be found by the students themselves in the form of magazine and newspaper articles, video clips from television news shows, interviews, etc. Teachers will want to make their own suggestions as to what the most effective, revealing and useful sources might be, depending on the level of the class and the length of time devoted to the project. The *New York Times* and/or *Washington Post* ought to be provided or expect to be used regularly.

Procedures:

After an introduction of the two systems and some discussion (approximately two class days), students will assign themselves to a topic common to both governments (health care reform, specific trade policies and/or treaties, foreign policy with a particular country or region, or any such similar issue), and then, over the course of the quarter or semester, collect data with the object being to write a comprehensive comparison/contrast paper on how each system dealt with the topic. Students will be expected to track the paths of legislation, hearings, votes, crises, etc.

Assessment:

For high school students, the summary paper (8-10 pages) will be graded and weighted heavily. It is expected that it will include an annotated bibliography, including a balanced selection of source materials and primary sources. Analyses of the above questions are the core of the paper. Students also will be asked to do a summary of their findings before the class. They would be expected to demonstrate a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of both systems and be able to make clear statements in response to the following questions:

1. What was the **time** involved for the issue you followed to be resolved (if it was)?
2. Describe the process by which **each branch** of government dealt with the issue.
3. What role did **advocacy groups** play in the process? Identify and compare.
4. Did the **final bill** or law (if there was one) that emerged at the end of the process bear much resemblance to the **initial proposal**? Explain.
5. Describe the **role of the opposition** in the final product or decision. Explain.
6. Specifically, how did the **executive branch** of government in each system affect the outcome?
7. How many versions of the bill were considered?
8. Compare the role of hearings in each government. Were there expert witnesses? Compare the length and substance of these.
9. What kinds of **financial resources** were expended on behalf of opposing or supporting the legislation? Identify and compare major opponents and supporters of the proposed legislation.
10. What **role**, if any, **did the states or provinces** play in the process? Comment.

Additional Notes:

A valuable portion of this kind of assignment is letting kids experience what the “other public” thinks of its own system and of the one that exists across the border. Have students watch CBC News and CSPAN’s coverage of the British Prime Minister answering questions posed by his Opposition. Tape Canadian political interviews and talk shows when appropriate and discuss in class as part of this unit. Compare letters to the editor in Canadian and US newspapers on similar topics. Such activities have the obvious potential to make this assignment really quite memorable for both teacher and student.