

Activity Plan: Coal Terminal Stakeholder Discussion

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Description:

This activity plan uses a “stakeholder” strategy for discussion of whether the Cherry Point coal terminal should be built in Washington State.

Grade Level(s):

Grade 7

Subject(s):

Social Studies (Civics focus) and Language Arts

Duration:

70-95 minutes, usually over two days

Goal:

For students to see decision-making as complex and nuanced, especially when the decision impacts large varieties of people with different perspectives and priorities

Objectives:

Students will:

- Read primary sources to gather information about a single perspective
- Gather evidence to support their individual perspective
- Share and compare their learning with others of the same perspective
- Discuss with others of different perspectives and come to a decision

Standards:

- This lesson meets the following state Washington State Social Studies standards:
 - Civics: Analyzes an issue that attempts to balance individual rights and the common good.
 - Economics: Analyzes examples of how groups and individuals consider profit and personal values in making economic choices in United States history.
- This lesson meets Common Core Literacy standards:
 - Reading: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text
 - Writing: Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text *done verbally

Background Information:

The proposal to expand the production and shipping of coal out of the United States is being debated nationwide and particularly in the state of Washington. In order to expedite the process, companies would like to build new or expand existing port structures so that coal can be transferred from trains to ships at a much higher volume than is feasible with the current port capacity. Many groups have expressed concerns about each segment of the journey the coal takes on its path from the mines to foreign power plants. Other stakeholders list not only the economic benefits for many communities but also the need for expediency due to the uncertain nature of the global market.

Interested stakeholder groups include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Companies involved (mining, shipping, construction) at different levels (workers, management, owners)
- Neighbors (those who live near mines, railroad lines, ports) both within and outside of the United States
- Cities nearby
- Environmentalists
- Those with health concerns (dust, pollution)
- Native American tribes

Primary Source Documents/Resources:

- <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/>
- <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/121105PR-CoalTrainTrafficImpactStudy.pdf>
- <http://projects.oregonlive.com/coal/map.php>
- <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/geographic/gatewaypacific/>
- <http://gatewaypacificterminal.com/>
- <http://www.uscoalexports.org/>
- http://createnwjobs.com/?gclid=CJjn4_6iobkCFeU5QgodrRAAuw
- <http://www.energyjustice.net/coal>
- <http://content.sierraclub.org/coal/washington>

Materials:

- Overview PowerPoint for explaining background of issue
- Roles (last page) cut apart for students to draw
- Computers with internet access for research
- Sufficient space for discussion

Procedures:

1. Present the issue as a proposal, outlining the most basic pros/cons. Finish with the guiding question: Should we allow the company to build a new coal terminal at Cherry Point? (Recommended PPT: GlobermanCoalPortsNSCC presentation) (10 minutes)
2. Students draw the position of a stakeholder from a hat (repeat roles based on class size). Explain their task. (5 minutes)
 - Owner of a mining company
 - Worker at the current port in Vancouver
 - Unemployed construction worker near proposed port
 - Person living next to the railroad track
 - Parent of a child with asthma aggravated by smog
 - Lummi fisherman
3. Give students time to explore the sites listed, looking for information to support their position. Some roles have clear positions, but others are more open, and may be colored by a student's prior knowledge. Instruct students to take notes on information—especially that which will support their position and might convince others to join them. (20-30 minutes or more, depending on depth expected and time constraints)
4. Students meet in like-role small groups (all mining owners together, fishermen together, etc.) to share information and positions and plan the essential information to share with the other stakeholders. (10-15 minutes)
5. Students independently write position (thesis statements) with supporting bullet points on note cards to prepare for whole-group discussion. (5 minutes, or homework)
6. Arrange class desks in a circle, and seat stakeholder groups together. Explain guidelines:

- Each speaker must limit their statements to 30 seconds at most
 - Each speaker chooses the next speaker
 - The next speaker must be from a different stakeholder group
 - Everyone must contribute at some point (keep track on a class list and limit those who over-share)
7. Discussion moderated by instructor. The instructor's role is to point out benefits to the greater society such as economic stimulus. The class is trying to come to consensus with either a final decision or a plan of action about what other information they need in order to make the decision. Instructor has a voice but no vote.(20-30 minutes)
8. Follow-up with updates as they occur in the public debate.

Evaluation/Assessment:

As students speak, mark on the class list about what kind of comment they make. Use a quick notation about whether they bring up new information, support another's statement, ask a question, refute the statement of another student, or say something to facilitate discussion. A wide variety of comments (without overtaking the discussion) will indicate the best understanding. Collect the thesis statements with supporting details to check for basic understanding and support the discussion markings. Score according to your proficiency scale.

Possible Extension:

For high-level students, challenge them to take the role of another stakeholder (the ones described are only a small sample) and defend that position. With a smaller, high-functioning (or older) group it might be possible to have each person take a different viewpoint and skip steps 2 and 4 in the group. The activity can be easily extended through longer or more structured research. A possible ending step to incorporate more writing standards would be a writing piece such as a persuasive letter to a legislator.

Additional Notes:

Depending on the level of your class and access to technology, you might target the reading to specific groups of students by printing the relevant articles for those groups. This is also a good targeted assistance for students with specific needs.

Mining Company Owner

You own a mining company in the mid-west. Your company removes the top of a mountain in order to access the coal that is buried underneath. The economy has hit your company hard, and with environmentalists speaking out against fossil fuels your company has hit hard times in the last few years. At the peak of production you had about 500 people working in your mine, but you are down to about 300, which means that there are 200 people who cannot find work in your area, affecting your entire community. If there is a new market for your coal, you could increase production and re-hire some, if not all of those who are currently unemployed.

Worker at the port in Vancouver

You work at the port in Vancouver that exports coal. The coal that comes through your port is dumped out of the train cars into large piles, and then moved by conveyor belt into a large ship when it arrives. The port is operating near capacity, which means you work all the time and often have to work overtime. That's great for the paycheck, but the work is dusty, and after a twelve-hour shift you are covered in black dust. If the new port is built in the United States you might be able to rest a bit... but then again, business might slow so much that you lose your job.

Unemployed construction worker near proposed port

Since 2008 when your last big project finished you just haven't been able to find a job! You have a family to support, so you have been working side jobs as much as you can, but barely can make ends meet. You own a small house, but since you lost your job your two kids have grown up, and what was plenty of space for them when they were small is really tight. You won't be able to move until you have something steady, though. The company you used to work for is just right for the job of building the port, so if they get the bid you would definitely be able to work for them, and they might make enough money to re-start other projects as well! It also might be temporary...

Person living next to the railroad track

You love your little house in Edmonds! It isn't very big, but you have a perfect view of the ferry dock, looking out over the railroad tracks. Your favorite part of the day is sitting on your front porch to watch the water. The occasional train rolling by is not a big deal. Sometimes you get stuck waiting at a light for five minutes, but it isn't a big deal unless you are late for work. Lately, though, train traffic has gone from 10 or so trains per day to 25 or 30, and these are super long coal trains! That means sometimes having to wait 10 minutes or more at a light, which can be really annoying. Things seem to get dusty a lot faster, too, even inside the house. Every winter mudslides block the tracks and they are closed for a few days, which is nice and quiet.

Parent of a child with asthma aggravated by smog

You always wanted to be a parent, and your life has been centered around your precious little girl for nearly five years now. You and your spouse moved to Spokane to be away from the hustle and bustle of Seattle so that you could afford to buy a house in a nice area for your family. Unfortunately your little girl has trouble with asthma. You give her breathing treatments and have an inhaler if she starts to have trouble. She does pretty well, but when it hasn't rained in a while she struggles. There aren't any coal power plants directly in the area, but even the smog from the freeway is a problem. You are worried about her ability to play outside at all later in life if pollution increases.

Lummi fisherman

You grew up on the reservation near Bellingham and have been taught the traditional methods of your people. You make your living fishing just off Cherry Point, in waters that were guaranteed to your tribe in treaties with the United States government. You take pride in your way of life. Fishing isn't just your profession or livelihood—it is the way you connect with your ancestors and understand your place in the world. The thought of a coal terminal limiting your rights is highly disturbing. It would mean not only a personal loss, but break of trust with the United States for your people. It doesn't matter how they promise to compensate for that loss because it isn't something that can be replaced. If the port is built you will lose part of your ancestry.