



NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT COMPROMISE



Overview

The **Analyzing Floor Debates** collection related to the theme *Critical Thinking* is designed to take students through a step-by-step exploration of the argumentation process used in Congress. Students will examine the main components of an effective, thoughtful argument, analyze historical and modern examples of Congressional debates, and learn how to present a case on a particular issue using the Congressional procedure.

This lesson plan provides teachers with an outline of the content of this collection as well as extension activities to support the learning of the content.

TPS Resource

- Multi-media assets including video, audio, slideshows, and student interactive activities
- Found at: <http://www.tpscongress.org/teachers/activities.php?id=4>

Target Audience

Grades 8–12

Instructional Time

1–2 class periods

Big Ideas

- The legislative process comprises complex systems put in place to prevent hasty and ill-considered decisions.
- Floor debates concerning legislation in the House and Senate are governed by internal rules of civility, content, and time.

Concepts & Key Terms

- Floor Debate
- Congressional
- Floor Statement
- Critical Analysis



Formal Assessment

- ◇ In Section Three, students produce answers to 12 questions about a selected floor statement from the 1800s. These responses can be printed and turned in for assessment.
- ◇ In Section Five, students are given instructions for drafting a 400-word statement of their own about the same statement they selected in Section Three. Collect these statements to assess student understanding of Congressional floor debates, ensuring that each:
 1. Contains 400 words or less,
 2. Is appropriate to the topic and issues at hand, and
 3. Uses at least one of the 13 considerations outlined in Section 2.

Overview of Critical Thinking

Our Founding Fathers were careful to limit the power of the Legislative branch of the US government, placing numerous hurdles in their path to prevent Congress from passing bad ideas quickly in the heat of the moment. The Critical Thinking collection in Teaching with Primary Sources explores Congressional floor debates to demonstrate how Congress gives new legislative ideas careful scrutiny. Following is a brief summary of each section in this collection:

I. Critical Thinking, Section One: Introduction (video, 2 minutes)

Former Representative Lee Hamilton of the Center on Congress introduces the collection by explaining the importance of critical thinking and careful analysis in the legislative process.

A second, 9 minute, video in this section shows what an actual Congressional floor debate looks like—specifically, the June 2009 debate in the House of Representatives on regulating tobacco, shown on C-SPAN video.

II. Critical Thinking, Section Two: Review Persuasive Techniques (interactive)

Students explore the roles that thirteen types of considerations play as Members of Congress attempt to persuade their colleagues in a floor debate:

- Facts and Figures
- Examples and Illustrations
- Effectiveness of Solution
- Historical Understanding
- Connect to Core Values
- Fairness
- Long-term Consequences
- Compare to Alternatives
- Anticipate Objections
- Opinion of Experts
- Public Support
- Political Support
- Emotional Component

III. Critical Thinking, Section Three: Choose a Topic (interactive)

Through exploration of a series of multi-media resources, students analyze one Congressional floor statement chosen from the mid-1800s, the main components of the argument, and how well the Senator or Representative did in making the case. Choices include:

- The Purchase of Alaska
- The Treatment of Confederates after the Civil War
- The Transcontinental Railroad Survey
- The Need for State Land-Grant Universities

IV. Critical Thinking, Section Four: Gallery of Key Statements (interactive)

Examine eight key Congressional statements over the years, from James Madison's discussion of the Bill of Rights to Margaret Chase Smith's denouncement of the scare tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

In addition, in this section students are offered a PDF document explaining how to locate Congressional debates from 1789 to the present in the Library of Congress.

V. Critical Thinking, Section Five: Final Assignment (video instructions)

This section sets up the culminating activity, in which students select one of the topics from Section Three, choose a side, and then craft their own floor statement to take before the “committee of the whole.” *NOTE: This written product is done outside the TPS site.*

Extension Activity for Floor Debate Analysis

The Critical Thinking assets are arranged in such a way that your students can progress through them in logical order to learn how Congress conducts floor debates in a structured process. Following are two suggestions for extending that learning.

EXTENSION IDEA ONE: CONDUCT A FLOOR DEBATE (HISTORICAL)

1. Divide the class or have students self-select into pairs or small groups.
2. Select a historical policy or Act for the class to work on, either according to what you are covering in your core curriculum, or a topic that is of particular interest.
3. Provide each group with a copy of the **Guide to Finding Congressional Debates in the Library of Congress American Memory Website** (see link in sidebar).
4. Have groups search the Library's sources to research the policy or Act. Instruct them to make sure they know enough about the issue to choose a side. Make a list of which side each group selects.
5. Refer groups back to Section Two of the Critical Thinking collection (<http://www.tpscongress.org/teachers/activity.php?id=6>), and ask them to select two or three of the persuasive techniques they might use in their statements.
6. Working together, have pairs or small groups craft a floor statement of 400 words or less on one side of the debate or the other.
7. Conduct a mock debate, in which you, as chairman, call for a group's representative to present their statement. Switch sides each time.
8. When all groups have presented their statements, call for a vote of yays and nays to determine which side "won." Compare your class vote to the actual vote of that issue from the historical record.

EXTENSION IDEA TWO: ANALYZE A FLOOR DEBATE (CURRENT)

Search the C-SPAN Library website (see link in sidebar) by typing the phrase "floor debate" with parentheses, into the search box at the top of the screen. Scan recent floor debates and select one for students to analyze.

Project the video for the class to view, and then, working independently or in small groups, have student analyze ONE STATEMENT from the debate, using the same 12 questions they answered in Section Three of the collection:

1. State the issue.
2. What is the conclusion and main evidence given?
3. Do you think the speaker was biased?
4. Are any of the facts and figures questionable?
5. Do any of the claims about the benefits presented seem exaggerated?
6. Did the speaker cite the public's view? Why is this convincing?
7. Did he/she speak about similar measures passed by Congress?
8. Did the speaker respond to possible objections to his or her proposal?
9. Did the speaker appeal to our shared values? Was this effective?
10. What sort of evidence was offered on the other side? Was it effective?
11. What did you find most and least convincing about this statement?
12. Were you convinced? How would you grade it (A-F)?



Time

One class period each

Materials

- ◇ **Computer(s) with Internet Access.** (one for each teacher and/or individuals or groups)
- ◇ Optional: Projector

Preparation

- ◇ **Extension Idea One:** Follow the link in the blue oval on this page to the **Guide to Finding Congressional Debates in the Library of Congress American Memory Website:** <http://www.tpscongress.org/teachers/activity.php?id=10>
- ◇ **Extension Idea Two:** Explore C-SPAN's Video Library, found at <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/>, and select a Floor Debate on a current topic of interest.

Ongoing Assessment

- ◇ Monitor the class to ensure that all students are participating in the task and/or discussion.

Formal Assessment

- ◇ Analyze student products or assess their presentations for completeness of answers and accuracy in facts.
- ◇ Look for evidence that students understand the critical thinking process conducted in Congressional Floor Debates.



The Library of Congress

Library of Congress collections contain over 147 million books, periodicals, manuscripts, maps, music, recordings, images, and electronic resources. More than 16 million records describing these collections are located in the Library's online catalog, found at <http://catalog2.loc.gov/>.

C-SPAN Video Library

The C-SPAN Archives records, indexes, and archives all C-SPAN programming for historical, educational, research, and archival uses. Every C-SPAN program aired since 1987, almost totaling over 196,000 hours, is contained in the C-SPAN Archives and immediately accessible through the database and electronic archival systems developed and maintained by the C-SPAN Archives. Found at: <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/>



Primary sources used in Section Three

NOTE: Teachers should preview all assets to ensure they are age-appropriate for their students. At the time of publication, all URLs were valid.

Alaska Purchase Images

Harpers Weekly Cartoon—"The Big Thing" by Thomas Nast, published April 20, 1867

<http://www.harpreweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=April&Date=20>

Map: North western America showing the territory ceded by Russia to the United States

<http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cdmg21/id/2984>

Check for the Purchase of Alaska (1868)

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=41>

Icebergs, bay, and mountain in background, Alaska (1899)

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3g08296/>

Transcontinental Railway Survey Images

"Memorial and Joint Resolution relative to a grant of Lands," February 11, 1858

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/treasures_of_congress/Images/page_15/50a.html

Ceremony at "wedding of the rails," May 10, 1869 at Promontory Point, Utah

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b07534/>

Railroad Building on the Great Plains—drawing

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c32926/>

Land Grant Universities Images

Morrill Act (1862)

http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc_large_image.php?flash=false&doc=33

Iowa State University

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ia0095/>

Michigan State

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/pan.6a06551/>

Removing Political Disabilities Images

Engineers of the 8th N.Y. State Militia, 1861

<http://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/photos/index.html>

The Man with the (Carpet) Bags" cartoon by Thomas Nast, 1872

<http://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/HTALLANT/COURSES/his312/jcoleman/front.htm>

PDF of the Senate Report

http://www.tpscongress.org/activities/critical_thinking_3/59_Feb_28_1872_Abbott.pdf

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