

Performance Task:

Laws That Work, Laws That Don't: The Consequences of Legislation

Grade Level: 11/12

Referencing Vermont Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements for Health, Global Citizenship, and Informed and Integrative Thinking

Contributors: Michael Eppolito, Donna McAlister, Rob Reardon, Sigrid Olson, Kate Gardoqui



Table of Contents

Sample Task	
Overview; Standards and Learning Objectives.....	4
Big Ideas/Enduring Understanding; Focus Questions; Culminating Task.....	5
Global Citizenship Task Description.....	6
Global Citizenship Task Instructions.....	7
Instructional Activities & Other Resources	
Content/Sources/Materials; Formative Tasks, Directions, and Instructional Supports.....	8
Instructional Activity: Activating Prior Knowledge: Brainstorming.....	8
Instructional Activity: Analyzing Historical Documents.....	9
Prohibition: Reading Questions.....	10
Instructional Activity: Modeling a System.....	11
Visual Models for Complex Systems or Processes.....	12
Modeling the Failure of Prohibition.....	14
Diagram #1: Fishbone Diagram.....	15
Diagram #2: Cycle Diagram.....	16
Instructional Activity: Analyzing Texts.....	17
Text Questions on “Reducing Accidents is Key to Lower Child Mortality”.....	18
Instructional Activity: Analyzing Legislative Documents.....	19
Practice: Reading and Understanding Legislation.....	20
Legislation: Reading Questions.....	21
Legislation: Read and Annotate.....	22
Instructional Activity: Research: Writing Research Questions.....	24
Introductory Research Questions for Laws That Work, Laws That Don’t: The Consequences of Legislation.....	

	25
What Are Your Questions?.....	27
Probing Questions for Peer Conference.....	28
Instructional Activity: Seeking and Evaluating Sources.....	29
Research Planning Sheet.....	31
Note-Taking Guide for Text Sources.....	32
Instructional Activity: Integrating Your Sources.....	33
Around the Table.....	34
Formative and Summative Assessment.....	35

Overview

Legislation and public policy are intended to shape behavior and support the general welfare of a community or society. However, any legislation or policy can have unintended consequences. The goal of this project is to help students consider the complexities of how laws operate in society and to help them make informed evaluations of those laws.

This task is authentic because students will be studying current social issues and legislation and will have the chance, if they choose, to send their letters to legislators in order to try to influence future amendments to the law they studied.

Standards and Learning Objectives

The following content standards, transferable skills and connected learning targets/objectives will be demonstrated and assessed in the culminating task:

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Graduation Proficiency: Inquiry

1A.a. Ask focused, probing, and significant questions that encourage inquiry around an issue of personal, community, or global relevance.

1B.a. Determine the validity and reliability of a document or information.

1B.d. Propose solutions to problems based on findings, and ask additional questions.

Graduation Proficiency: Civics, Government and Society

4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.

4c. Describe how government decisions directly impact citizens locally, nationally, and internationally.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Graduation Proficiency: Informed and Integrative Thinking

a. Apply knowledge from various disciplines and contexts to real life situations.

b. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge.

c. Apply systems thinking to understand the interaction and influence of related parts on each other, and on outcomes.

d. Use evidence and reasoning to justify claims.

e. Develop and use models to explain phenomena.

f. Use technology to support and enhance the critical thinking process.

If this task is used as a cross-disciplinary task in Health and Global Citizenship, the following content standards, transferable skills and connected learning targets/objectives will be demonstrated and assessed in the culminating task:

HEALTH

Graduation Proficiency: Analyze Influences

c. Analyze how public health policies and government regulations can influence health promotion and disease prevention.

Graduation Proficiency: Interpersonal Communication and Advocacy

e. Work cooperatively as an advocate for improving personal, family and community health.

Big Ideas/Enduring Understanding

Some laws work well, while others produce unintended consequences. Why is this? What lessons can be learned about effective government by studying how laws work or do not work?

Focus Questions

What are the overarching and guiding questions students will answer in order to develop these enduring understandings?

- Does understanding a system allow us to see a more complete picture and make better choices in terms of the policies that we put in place?
- How can we track and analyze systems effectively so that we understand the intended and unintended consequences of our decisions?

Culminating Task

Determine what type of evidence is required for students to demonstrate proficiency in the targeted standards and objectives. Describe the final task and the format it will take (e.g., you will present an argument for...by organizing a debate...).

Summative Task:

After researching legislation and the impacts of that legislation, students will develop a product in which they argue one of the following positions:

- How/why a piece of legislation should be changed or repealed;
- How/why a piece of legislation should remain the same;
- Why a new piece of legislation should be adopted.

One component of the students' argument must be a diagram or model, created by the student, that illustrates or explains the impact of the current legislation. The argument must also include an annotated bibliography listing their sources.

The intended audience for this argument must be a legislator.

For their final product, students can choose between creating an email with hyperlinks and attachments, a traditional paper letter with paper attachments, or a presentation that could be given to legislator or a group of legislators.

Global Citizenship Task Description: Laws That Work, Laws That Don't: The Consequences of Legislation

Learning Objectives

Transferable Skill: Informed and Integrative Thinking

- a. Apply knowledge from various disciplines and contexts to real life situations.
- b. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge.
- c. Apply systems thinking to understand the interaction and influence of related parts on each other, and on outcomes.
- d. Use evidence and reasoning to justify claims.
- e. Develop and use models to explain phenomena.
- f. Use technology to support and enhance the critical thinking process.

Global Citizenship: Inquiry

- 1A.a. Ask focused, probing, and significant questions that encourage inquiry around an issue of personal, community, or global relevance.
- 1B.a. Determine the validity and reliability of a document or information.
- 1B.d. Propose solutions to problems based on findings, and ask additional questions.
- 1C.c. After examining issues from more than one perspective, define and defend the rights and needs of others in the community, nation, and world.

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

- 4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.
- 4c. Describe how government decisions directly impact citizens locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 4d. Explain and defend their own point of view on issues that affect themselves and society; use information gained from reputable sources; explain, critically evaluate, and defend views that are not one's own.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

Students will need access to computers on which they can compose their letters/emails/presentations.

Teacher Instructions

1. Hand out the project rubric and review your expectations with the students.
2. Have the students use the Design Guide to plan and create their final product.

Possible Project Extensions

In this project, students will be proposing amendments to laws, advocating for the repeal of laws, or explaining why they believe that laws should remain on the books unchanged. For possible ways to bring additional authenticity to the project, you could contact local legislative offices to see if representatives might be able to come and listen to presentations by your students. Alternatively, you could organize a field trip to the state house in order to hand-deliver the letters.

Global Citizenship Task Instructions

You have studied the data about the law of your choice. Now is your chance to think about what you think would be the *best* policies for Vermont or the USA to enact in response to this issue.

Your task will be to develop an argument for ONE of the following positions:

- How/why a piece of legislation should be changed or repealed;
- How/why a piece of legislation should remain the same;
- Why a new piece of legislation should be adopted.

Your argument can be written in the form of an email with hyperlinks and attachments, a traditional paper letter with paper attachments, or a presentation that could be given to legislator or a group of legislators. One component of your argument must be a diagram or model, created by you, that illustrates or explains the impact of the current legislation. You must also include an annotated bibliography listing your sources.

The intended audience for this argument must be a legislator.

In your presentation, you will need to provide evidence that the issue you are addressing is an important one, and you will need to explain your reasoning about why you think your proposed amendments or new law will work or why the law you want to repeal does not work.

Plan your position paper by filling in each of the sections on the following page. Then use these notes to help you build a complete document. All of the categories listed here must be addressed.

1. Introduce yourself with a slide or paragraph explaining who you are, your age, what town you live in & what school you attend, and any other introductory information that you would like to include.
2. What is the name of the legislation will you be writing about?
3. Provide some background information about the issue or problem that this law was first written to address.
4. Your thesis: State whether you think this law should be amended or repealed, kept as is, or whether a new law should be introduced to address the issue you have researched.
5. Present and explain the evidence that you have gathered to support your position. Your evidence must come from a wide variety of sources, integrated to provide strong support for your position. You must present and plain at least three pieces of evidence or data that support your position.
6. Create and include a diagram or model illustrating the causes and effects connected with the legislation as it is now. You can use a cycle diagram or a fishbone diagram, or you can create your own design. Your diagram or model can be 2 or 3-dimensional; if it is 3-dimensional, include photographs in your final letter or presentation.
7. Once your proposed amendment or law has been adopted, what data could the state/country collect that would help determine whether it had been a success or not?
8. At the end of your letter, email or slide show, include a list of sources. Your list should be alphabetized by author and each entry should be organized according to the format your teacher requires (MLA or APA). Each entry must be accompanied by a sentence explaining why this source meets your criteria for being valid and reliable.

Content/Sources/Materials

All information sources and texts needed for this task are included in this packet as internet links. Students and teachers will need internet access and devices that can link to the internet in order to access these sources.

Formative Tasks, Directions and Instructional Supports

Based on the determination of the evidence required for students to demonstrate proficiency in the targeted standards and objectives, the formative tasks and assessments listed on pages 6 - 33 will allow students to build knowledge and apply skills in preparation for the culminating task.

Instructional Activity: Activating Prior Knowledge: Brainstorming

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

No materials are needed except for questions listed below.

Teacher Instructions

One of the big ideas at the heart of this project is that community well-being is dependent upon a balance of personal and social responsibility. When local, state and national governments pass laws that are intended to increase public health and safety, these laws can have unintended consequences. The goal of this project is for each student to develop a thorough understanding of how one of these laws functions, and then to evaluate it.

This brainstorming prompt is intended to help students work together to create a class list of laws that are intended to increase public health and safety. This class list will become the list of laws that students can choose to study for their project.

You can start by giving students time to brainstorm or write in their journals individually in response to the question below: then have them work together to build a class list of ideas.

Brainstorming Question

What laws exist in our town, state or country that have been written and passed for the purpose of increasing public health and safety? List as many as you can.

Instructional Activity: Analyzing Historical Documents

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

- 4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.
- 4b. Analyze the principles in key U.S. and international documents and how they apply to their own lives.
- 4c. Describe how government decisions directly impact citizens locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 4d. Explain and defend their own point of view on issues that affect themselves and society; use information gained from reputable sources; explain, critically evaluate, and defend views that are not one's own.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

Access to online texts/materials or printouts of the relevant documents and instructions.

Link to [The Volstead Act](#) page on the National Archives website.

Link to [PBS page about Prohibition](#).

Laptops or other devices on which students can watch Ken Burns videos on Prohibition.

[Link to PBS videos](#).

Teacher Instructions

The Volstead Act (the National Prohibition Act) is a perfect example from American history of a law that was intended to bring about positive social effects but which had such negative unintended consequences that it was eventually repealed. This collection of resources and activities can be used to give students practice in analyzing the intentions of a law as opposed to its effects.

Class Activities

Begin with the [PBS background page on Prohibition](#). Students can read the page (and, if you choose, explore the videos on the video page) for homework on the night before you plan to have them analyze the documents, so that they will have prior knowledge that they can call upon.

On the following page is a homework assignment to guide them through the text; you can add questions or revise if you plan to use the videos on the site as well.

Once students have explored these background materials, they will be ready for the texts and activities on the National Archives website. (A link to Teaching Activities can be found on the right side of the page.)

One of the texts on the National Archives page is a letter from Harry S. Truman to Bess Wallace. This letter is handwritten and can be hard to decipher. If students want to work with a typed version of the Truman letter, they can find one on [this page](#) at Truman Archives website.

Prohibition: Reading Questions

Read through the PBS page about Prohibition, "[Unintended Consequences](#)," and answer the following questions.

1. This article begins with an anecdote about a visit that a German politician paid to NY. Why did the author of this piece choose to start with this story?
2. What were some of the economic benefits that were predicted as possible results of Prohibition before it was enacted?
3. In the space below, describe five of the actual economic impacts of Prohibition.
4. Prohibition was intended to be an important piece of public health legislation. What were its actual impacts on public health and safety?

Instructional Activity: Modeling a System

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

4c. Describe how government decisions directly impact citizens locally, nationally, and internationally.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

You will need the PBS page about Prohibition, "[Unintended Consequences.](#)"

Teacher Instructions

Once students have read the PBS page and answered and reviewed the text questions they will be ready to try their hand at modeling the system that it describes.

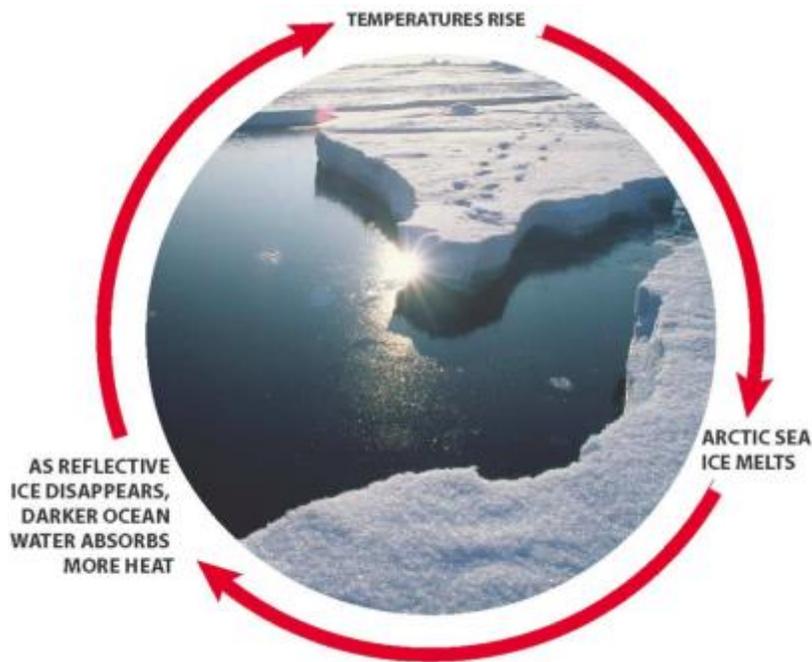
Class Activities:

Distribute the instructions on the following page. You can have students do this activity in pairs or independently.

Visual Models for Complex Systems or Processes

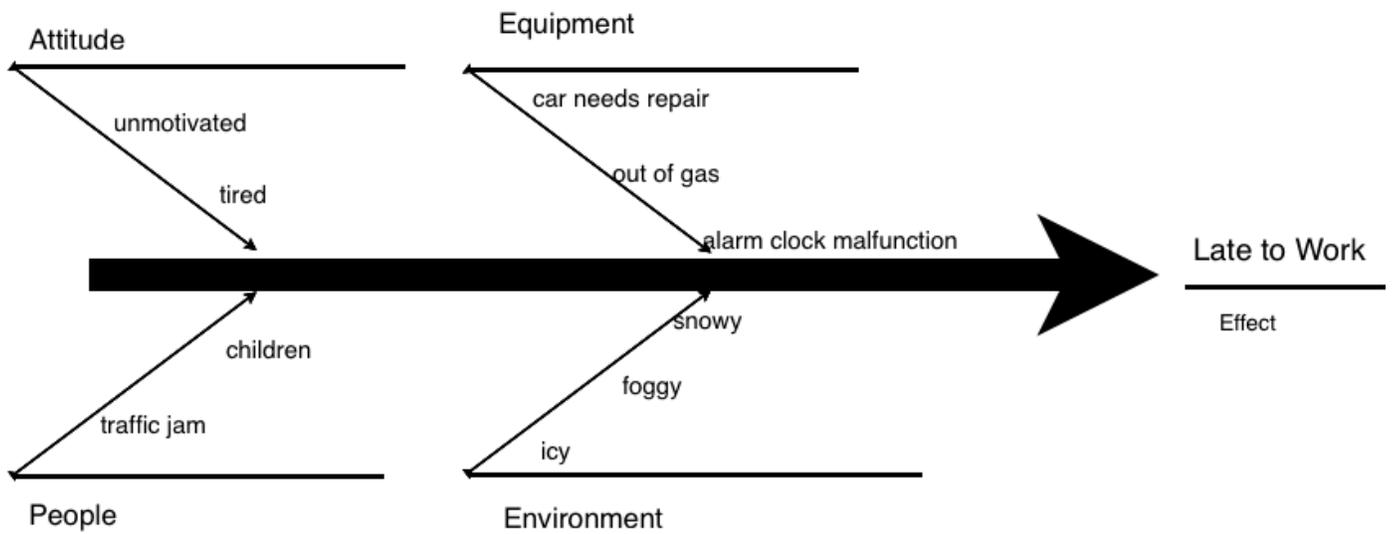
When you are trying to sort out causes and effects within a system, a visual diagram can be a very helpful tool. Two frequently-used types of diagrams are the cycle diagram and the fishbone diagram.

The cycle diagram is used in situations where a feedback loop exists - where one factor increases another factor, which then increases the first factor. Here is an example of a cycle diagram which explains how rising global temperatures cause sea ice to melt, which increases the amount of dark ocean water on the globe, which then absorbs more heat from the sun, causing temperatures to rise more.



Source: National Research Council. 2011. Graphic Concept by Madeline Ostrander as published in Yes! Magazine.

A fishbone diagram is used in situations where many causes combine to yield one result. It is often used by engineers to determine all of the possible causes for the failure of a product component, or by businesses to determine why a certain part of their system or process is not working well. In a fishbone diagram, a central arrow (or the “backbone arrow”) represents the effect that is being investigated. Diagonal arrows pointing down or up towards the central arrow represent broad categories of causes which may be contributing to the effect. Along these diagonal arrows are smaller labels which name all of the discrete causes within that category. Here is an example:



The fishbone diagram can help you explore or consider all of the possible causes of an effect, which can be the first step towards finding a solution.

Modeling the Failure of Prohibition

Use the attached templates or design your own graphic or 3-D model to depict and explain the causes of the failure of Prohibition. The following short documentary videos available on the [PBS website Prohibition page](#) can be used as sources. You can also do additional research to supplement the information from the videos:

[Satan's Seat](#)

[Terribly Wonderful](#)

[Rum Row](#)

[Beer Wars](#)

Your graphic, diagram or model can be as elaborate or simple as you like, but it must achieve the following goals:

1. Depict at least four reasons for the failure of Prohibition in the US.
2. Portray the relationship between these causes, either by grouping them into categories or illustrating how they impacted or intensified each other.
3. Include a written paragraph discussing why you chose the graphic design that you did, and any limitations that it might have in explaining the causes of the failure of Prohibition.
4. Your graphic will be assessed using these criteria:

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXPANDING
<p>E. Develop and use models to explain phenomena.</p> <p>(Definition: a model is a representation of a system, process or complex concept.)</p>	<p>I can Identify the key components of a system in an existing model.</p>	<p>I can Use an existing model to explain a system or situation, and identify relationships within the system.</p>	<p>I can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and use an evidence-based model to explain a system or situation and analyze relationships within it; • Explain limitations of the model; • Identify flaws or errors and revise the model based on new learning. 	<p>I can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use or critique models to identify assumptions, develop generalizations, and predict outcomes for systems or situations; <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can create an alternative that expands upon proficient

Diagram #1: Fishbone Diagram

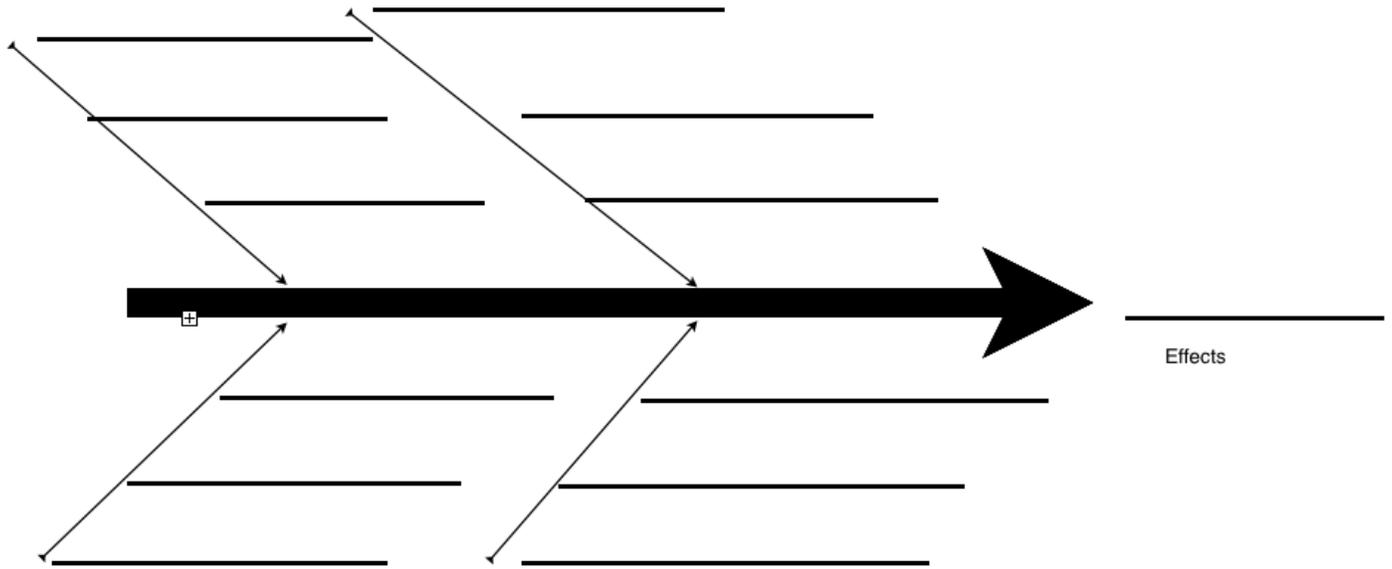
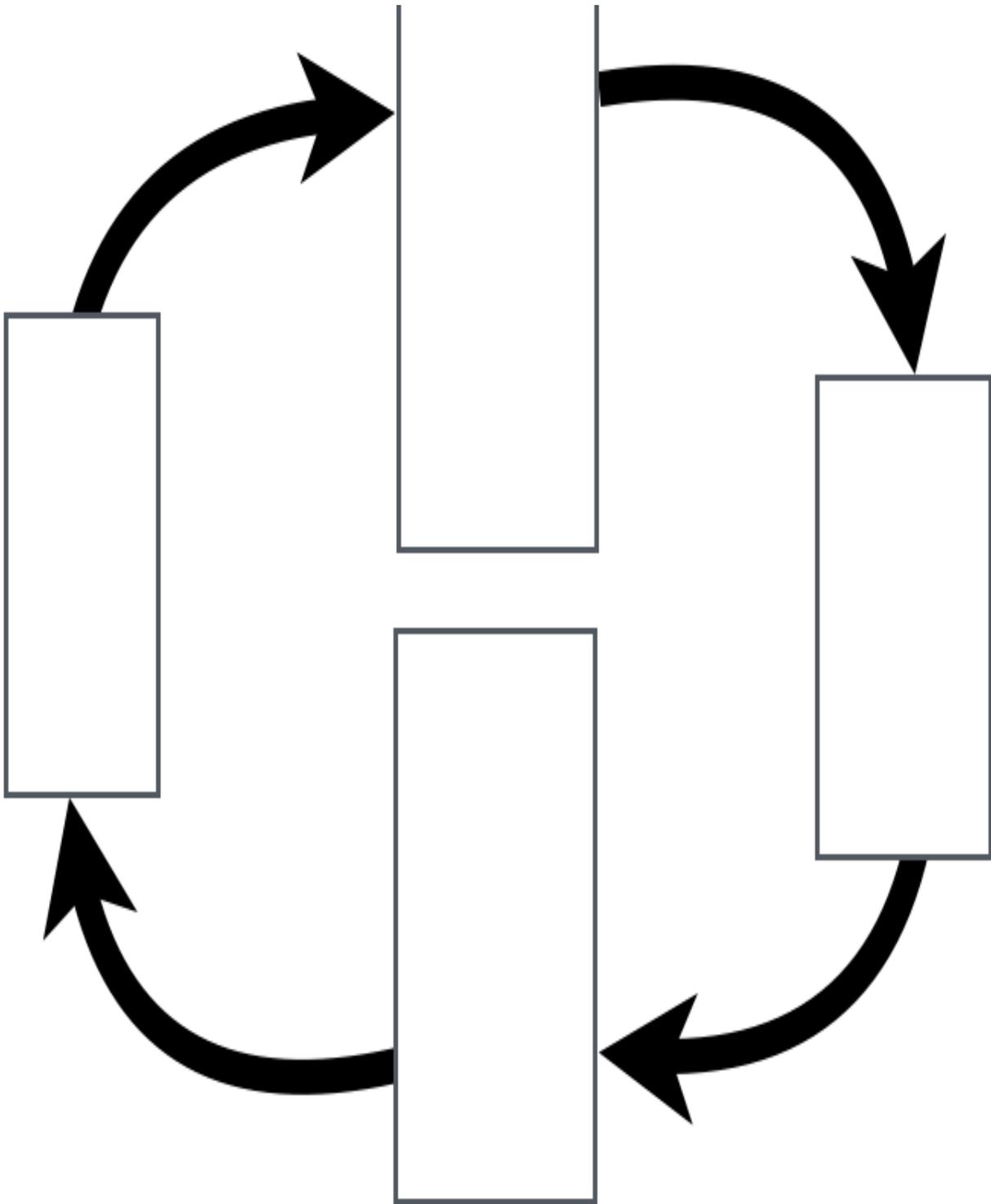


Diagram #2: Cycle Diagram



Instructional Activity: Analyzing Texts

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

- 4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.
- 4b. Analyze the principles in key U.S. and international documents and how they apply to their own lives.
- 4c. Describe how government decisions directly impact citizens locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 4d. Explain and defend their own point of view on issues that affect themselves and society; use information gained from reputable sources; explain, critically evaluate, and defend views that are not one's own.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

Article from the National Bureau of Economic Research: [“Reducing Accidents is Key To Lower Child Mortality.”](#)

Teacher Instructions

Have students read the article from the National Bureau of Economic Research entitled [“Reducing Accidents is Key To Lower Child Mortality”](#) and answer the text questions that can be found on the following page.

Class Activities

This reading, which will help deepen their understanding of the impact of accident prevention efforts, can be followed by a variety of activities to increase their familiarity with the range of laws that have been passed with the goal of preventing the accidental death of children. Here are some options:

1. Break the class into small groups and assign each group one hazard to children. (For example, car accidents, pool accidents, choking accidents, window accidents, plastic bag accidents). Have the groups compete to see how many state or national laws they can find relating to their hazard. Once each group has created a list of laws, have each student choose a law and annotate the text. A sample guide for annotation can be found on the page following the text questions.
2. The last question in the set of text questions asks students to list the probing questions that they would like to investigate or learn more about after reading the National Bureau of Economic Research article. Have students select two or three of their own questions to research.

Text Questions on “Reducing Accidents is Key To Lower Child Mortality”

from the National Bureau of Economic Research.

1. The first paragraph of this article lists three factors that have reduced childhood mortality over the past three decades. Which of these factors does it highlight as causing a growing share of that improvement?
2. How many fewer children ages 5 -9 died of unintentional injury or accident in 1990 as compared to 1960?
3. List three laws that have been passed over the past thirty years in an effort to improve child safety.
4. The author of this article described several other factors besides laws that have worked to decrease child mortality from accidents. List these factors.
5. What probing questions would you like to investigate after reading this? What do you want to know more about?
6. This article describes the positive effects of laws that have been passed to increase child safety. If child safety laws are very effective, does that mean that states and countries should enact every child safety law that is proposed? What unintended consequences might result from too much safety legislation?

Instructional Activity: Analyzing Legislative Documents

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Civics, Government and Society

4a. Evaluate how and why rules and laws are created, interpreted, and changed; establish rules and/or policies for a group, school, or community.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

The text of the [Massachusetts Plastic bag Safety Law](#) (This is available on the following page).

Teacher Instructions

Have students read the law and answer the text questions that can be found at the end of the document.

Class Activities

This quick activity could be done as a class opening activity or a short homework assignment. After completing this assignment, if you think that students need more practice with close reading of legislation before working on the law that they are going to study, you could have them work with the Vermont Smoke Detector and Carbon Monoxide Detectors Law that is reproduced after the plastic bag law.

The annotation exercise can also be used as formative assessment of students' ability to read and understand pieces of legislation. The annotation guidelines are reproduced in the "Formative Assessments" section of this document, and can be used with piece of legislation that you choose,

Practice: Reading and Understanding Legislation

105 CMR 630.000: PLASTIC BAGS AND PLASTIC FILM

No person shall sell, offer for sale, or deliver, or offer for delivery, or give away any plastic bag or partial plastic bag intended for domestic or household use, or for packaging articles intended for domestic or household use, or which is so designed or decorated so as to encourage its use as a toy, the length and width of which when added together totals 25 inches or more and the opening of which when shaped into the form of a circle has a diameter of seven inches or more; and the material of which is less than one mil in thickness; unless such plastic bag bears the following warning statement, or such warning statement which the Director of Food and Drugs has approved as the equivalent thereof:

"WARNING: To avoid danger of suffocation, keep this plastic bag away from babies and children. Do not use this bag in cribs, beds, carriages or play pens. This bag is not a toy."

Such warning statement shall be imprinted in a prominent place on the plastic bag or shall appear on a label securely attached to the bag in a prominent place, and shall be printed in legible type which shall be contrasted by typography, lay-out or color from the contents of the bag and from other printed matter on the bag, if any. The size of the print of such statement shall be as follows:

Table 1

Total length and width of bag	Size of print
60 inches or more	At least 24 point
40 inches to, but not including 60 inches	At least 18 point
25 inches to, but not including 40 inches	At least 14 point

The label shall appear on both sides of a bag. In the case of bags whose total length and width is more than 40 inches, the label shall be repeated at 20-inch intervals. Whoever violates any provision of 105 CMR 630.000 shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$100.00 for the first offense, nor more than \$500.00 for any subsequent offense.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

105 CMR 630.000: M.G.L. c. 111, § 5D.

Legislation: Read and Annotate

Read the following law from the Vermont Statutes. Annotate as you read to indicate the following things:

1. Requirements that you feel would be expensive for a homeowner or builder to comply with.
2. Loopholes or exceptions to the law.
3. Words that are unfamiliar. If you find any of these, please look up the definition and include it in your margin notes.
4. Something that surprises you.

The Vermont Statutes: Title 9: Commerce And Trade: [Chapter 77: Smoke Detectors And Carbon Monoxide Detectors](#)

§ 2881. Definitions as used in this chapter:

(1) "Single-family dwelling" means any building or structure in which a family, families, or households reside that contains sleeping facilities and is not otherwise classified as a "public building" as defined in 20 V.S.A. § 2730(a) or as a "condominium" or "multiple unit dwelling" as defined in 20 V.S.A. § 2729(d).

(2) "Smoke detector" means a device that detects visible or invisible particles of combustion and sounds a warning alarm, is operated from a power supply within the unit or wired to it from an outside source, and is approved or listed for the purpose by Underwriters Laboratory or by another nationally recognized independent testing laboratory.

(3) "Carbon monoxide detector" means a device with an assembly that incorporates a sensor control component and an alarm notification that detects elevations in carbon monoxide levels and sounds a warning alarm, is operated from a power supply within the unit or wired to it from an outside source, and is approved or listed for the purpose by Underwriters Laboratory or by another nationally recognized independent testing laboratory. (Added 1993, No. 86, § 1; amended 2005, No. 19, § 1, eff. July 1, 2005.)

§ 2882. Installation

(a) A person who constructs a single-family dwelling shall install photoelectric-only-type smoke detectors in the vicinity of any bedrooms and on each level of the dwelling, and one or more carbon monoxide detectors in the vicinity of any bedrooms in the dwelling in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In a dwelling provided with electrical power, detectors shall be powered by the electrical service in the building and by battery.

(b) Any single-family dwelling when transferred by sale or exchange shall contain photoelectric-only-type smoke detectors in the vicinity of any bedrooms and on each level of the dwelling installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and one or more carbon monoxide detectors installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. A single-family dwelling constructed before January 1, 1994 may contain smoke detectors powered by the electrical service in the building or by

battery, or by a combination of both. In a single-family dwelling newly constructed after January 1, 1994 that is provided with electrical power, smoke detectors shall be powered by the electrical service in the building and by battery. In a single-family dwelling newly constructed after July 1, 2005 that is provided with electrical power, carbon monoxide detectors shall be powered by the electrical service in the building and by battery.

(c) Nothing in this section shall require an owner or occupant of a single-family dwelling to maintain or use a smoke detector or a carbon monoxide detector after installation. (Added 1993, No. 86 § 1; amended 2005, No. 19, § 1, eff. July 1, 2005; 2007, No. 180 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. May 29, 2008.)

§ 2883. Requirements for transfer of dwelling

(a) The seller of a single-family dwelling, including one constructed for first occupancy, whether the transfer is by sale or exchange, shall certify to the buyer at the closing of the transaction that the dwelling is provided with photoelectric-only-type smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in accordance with this chapter. This certification shall be signed and dated by the seller.

(b) If the buyer notifies the seller within 10 days by certified mail from the date of conveyance of the dwelling that the dwelling lacks any photoelectric-only-type smoke detectors, or any carbon monoxide detectors, or that any detector is not operable, the seller shall comply with this chapter within 10 days after notification.

(c) Violation of this section or of the installation requirements of section 2882 of this title shall not create a defect in title. (Added 1993, No. 86 § 1; amended 2005, No. 19, § 1, eff. July 1, 2005; 2007, No. 180 (Adj. Sess.), § 3, eff. May 29, 2008.)

Instructional Activity: Research: Writing Research Questions

Learning Objectives

Global Citizenship: Inquiry

1A.a. Ask focused, probing, and significant questions that encourage inquiry around an issue of personal, community, or global relevance.

Transferable Skill: Informed and Integrative Thinking

b. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

Writing Research Questions Worksheet and Peer Conference Guide.

Teacher Instructions

Writing good research questions is an art. It is important to spend time in class supporting students in writing and refining good questions. These exercises are intended to get students thinking about how to frame questions that will push them to gather and analyze information in creative ways. Any combination of the following activities, along with the What Are Your Questions? sheet on the next page, can be used to help students develop and refine their questions as they conduct their research.

Class Activities

Page one of this activity lists initial research questions that students can use to begin their research. Students should be given some time – at least one class period and the following evening – to research and take notes before moving on to the probing questions activity.

Once the students have notes on this basic information, they can begin to craft the questions that will guide them in conducting further study and eventually crafting an original thesis about the consequences of the law that they have chosen to study.

Using the “What Are Your Questions?” sheet as a guide, spend time in class having students brainstorm Probing Questions that will push their research and thinking further. Once students have brainstormed a list of Probing Questions, you can have them use the Probing Questions Peer Conference sheet on the next page to work in pairs to try to suggest questions for one another. It will take about 20 minutes for each pair of students complete a peer conference.

After the peer conferences are done, you can do one last activity to help students mine the classroom for good ideas. Go around the room, inviting each student to share their best probing question. Scribe all of these questions on the board. Once everyone has contributed a question, give the students some time to examine what is there; there may be excellent questions from other students that will apply to their own topics.

Introductory Research Questions for Laws That Work, Laws That Don't: The Consequences of Legislation

1. What is the official name of the law that you plan to research?
2. Is it a state or national law?
3. What are the central provisions of the law?
4. When was it enacted?
5. Who originally wrote/sponsored the bill?
6. What is your initial opinion about this law – do you think it is a good idea or a bad one? Why?
7. Do some searching and find at least three institutions, universities, medical research groups (such as the Center for Disease Control and the National Institute of Health) or other research centers that have done research on the impacts of this law or laws like it in other states or countries. List these organizations and the sources you have found in the space below. If you cannot find three groups that have researched this law or laws like it, ask your teacher for help or choose a different law to research.
8. If your law is a state law, how many other states have similar laws?

9. If your law is a national law, how many other nations have similar laws?

10. Do advocacy groups exist either in Vermont or across the nation that are dedicated to supporting or repealing this law?

11. What is the goal of this law?

12. What is the reasoning or argument that was made for its passage – what were the original intentions of the people who argued for it?

What Are Your Questions?

The questions that you choose to investigate will form the foundation of your research project.

You will need two types of questions to guide you through your research. The first type is Introductory Questions. Introductory Questions are simple questions of fact. You will need this type of question to help you begin your research, so that you can develop a basic understanding of the law that you are researching.

Once you have discovered the answers to these questions and developed a basic understanding of the law, you will create your next set of questions. Your Probing Questions will push you to develop a more complex and deep understanding of the implications or effects, of the law you are studying.

Probing Questions are intended to help you think more deeply about the issue at hand. As you develop your probing questions, be careful to avoid creating questions that are just restatements of your opinion. Try to create questions that will push you to seek out new perspectives on your research topic or discover information about it that goes beyond the basic facts.

Here are some tips for creating good probing questions:

- Write questions about possible connections among the factors that you are studying
- Write questions about the assumptions that people might make which may influence the issue you are studying
- Write questions about potential implications of the law you are studying
- Write questions exploring what factors could have caused people to advocate for this law
- Write questions about effects – especially the less obvious ones – of this law
- Write questions about data – what additional data might help you understand the law and its implications/effects more clearly?
- Write questions about similar or opposing laws that people have implemented in other countries or places

Once you have developed your probing questions, you will begin your second round of research, seeking answers to them. As you continue your research, the information that you find may lead you to ask further questions.

Probing Questions for Peer Conference

Goal: The goal of this peer conference is for you and your partner to help each other think of good probing questions that can extend your research and help you find meaning in the topic you are studying.

Materials Needed:

The research notes that you have taken so far.

The Probing Questions that you have brainstormed so far.

Roles:

The student who is presenting their research and questions is the Presenter.

The student who is providing support and ideas is the Listener.

Each student will have a chance to play each role.

Steps:

1. Share Research (3 minutes) The presenter gives a brief overview of the issue that he/she is studying.
Possible items to highlight:
 - a. The answers that you have found to your initial research questions
 - b. The things that you have found most surprising or interesting
2. Restatement (2 minutes) The listener summarizes back to the presenter what he or she heard, and identified the things that he or she found most intriguing.
 - a. What are the key details that got your attention?
 - b. What would you like to hear more about?
3. Reflection (1 minute)
 - a. The Listener takes a minute to reflect on what he/she has heard, and brainstorms some probing questions about the Presenter's topic.
4. Probing Questions (3 minutes)
 - a. The Listener shares his/her Probing Questions
 - b. The Presenter takes some time to note the Listener's questions, adding to their list, connecting them with other questions, or taking parts of them and modifying them.
 - c. The Presenter thanks the Listener for his/her suggestions.
5. Switch Roles
 - a. The Presenter and Listener switch roles and repeat the protocol.

Instructional Activity: Seeking and Evaluating Sources

Learning Objectives

1. Reading: Comprehend, interpret, analyze, and evaluate a wide range and level of complex literary and informational texts.

b. Evaluate content and multiple sources of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., print, digital, visual, quantitative) to address a question or solve a problem. (7)

i. Integrate information from diverse sources into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources. (9)

2. Writing: Produce clear and coherent writing for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

o. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (1) 11-12.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

Transferable Skill: Informed and Integrative Thinking

b. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge.

d. Use evidence and reasoning to justify claims.

Materials Needed

To prepare for this activity, students will need to have read a piece of investigative journalism or commentary. Choose an article with a wide variety of sources – an article that the author has researched by conducting interviews, researching online, looking at print sources, making observations of locations, events or artifacts, or engaging in other information-seeking strategies.

Some potential articles to use (all of these should be easy to find online):

“Two Heroes, One Common Dream,” by Aaron Kiersh. Kiersh was 16 years old when he won a Scholastic Gold Medal for this piece of reporting on two people, invisible and unknown to the wider world, trying to make a difference in depressed and violent urban areas.

“My Little Brother on Drugs,” by Jenny Everett. This 2004 article from Popular Science explores the social stigma around being short, and one boy’s attempt to face it.

“The College Dropout Boom,” by David Leonhardt. This New York Times article explores the issue of students who get into college but leave after a year or two.

Teacher Notes

Ask a roomful of teenagers about what creativity looks like and very few of them will talk about research. Yet the act of conducting research to solve a problem can be tremendously creative. Once students have

selected topics and initial questions for their research, it is important to spend some time helping them to see the incredible creativity that researchers can bring to the challenge of seeking information & perspective on a question. The activities described here can all be used to help students think more broadly and creatively about how they will search for and evaluate sources of information.

Note: These activities are designed with the assumption that by the end of high school, most students will already have learned about the difference between search engines and databases, how to use each effectively, and how to evaluate sources.

Class Activities

Begin class with a journal prompt: “What is creativity?”

After giving students time to write their responses and inviting students to share their thoughts, ask a follow-up question: What does creativity look like when a person is conducting research? Can research be creative? How?

Have students discuss this question and brainstorm with partners or in a group. Scribe their ideas on the whiteboard.

Have students review the article that they read the previous night for homework. Their goal is to list all of the ways that the author researched his or her topic. Give students a reasonable amount of time to complete this based on the length of the article, then discuss as a class. Either in discussion or as a journal prompt, give students time to think about how they can be creative in searching for sources of information. After this discussion, the students will be ready to fill out the Research Planning Sheet.

As students launch into their research, it will also be important to review with them the importance of evaluating sources for reliability. Questions 1-5 on the Note-Taking Guide are designed to help them evaluate each source.

The Note-Taking Guide is designed to be shared digitally with students, so that they can type right into it. If you will be sharing it on paper, you should increase the amount of space available for them to write.

Research Planning Sheet

Listed below are some strategies that researchers use to gather data or information about questions:

- Search Engine Searches
- Database Searches
- Library card catalog searches
- Mining the Works Cited pages of sources
- Interviews or email exchanges with experts
- Interviews or email exchanges with people connected with the topic
- Observations of locations, events or artifacts
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Examination of primary sources such as letters, legal documents, transcripts, speeches, art, or videos

In the space below, describe at least three strategies that you will use to gather the information that you will use to help you answer your questions.

Note-Taking Guide for Text Sources

In the space below, fill in the following citation information for this source: author's name; article title; title of magazine, journal or newspaper; date of publication; page numbers if applicable; name of database or website; date accessed.

Source Evaluation Questions:

- What kind of text is this?
- Who wrote it?
- If the piece is an article from a publication, where was it published?
- If the source is a website, does it have authors or sponsorships listed? Is there advertising on the page? Is there a bibliography so that you can see the author's sources?
- What interest might this author/publisher have in the issue? Circle one:

Scholarly Financial Journalistic Personal Other:

Notes:

Use the space below or use your own document to take notes on this source. Summarize the source's main points, and include 2 or 3 quotes that may be useful to you in your writing. When you are done reading the article and taking notes, answer the questions that follow.

1. What is the central message of this piece? Quote a core sentence – a sentence in which the author expresses the central point that he or she wanted readers or viewers to take from the piece.
2. How does this source relate to another source you have read or explored in the course of your research?
3. How does this article relate to something we have read, viewed or discussed in class?
4. How does it change your view of the issue you are researching?

Instructional Activity: Integrating Your Sources

Learning Objectives

Transferable Skill: Informed and Integrative Thinking

- a. Apply knowledge from various disciplines and contexts to real life situations.
- b. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge.
- c. Apply systems thinking to understand the interaction and influence of related parts on each other, and on outcomes.
- d. Use evidence and reasoning to justify claims.

Texts/Other Materials Needed

“Around the Table” worksheet, found on the following page.

Teacher Instructions

This activity is intended to help students engage with the various sources they have found. The goal is to push them to think about how each of the authors they have read or central figures that they have read about would respond to their own emerging views on the law. This activity is helpful in pushing students to refine their thinking about complex problems or issues. It can be assigned for homework or completed in class with breaks for discussion or sharing.

The worksheet is designed to be shared digitally with students, so that they can type right into it. If you will be sharing it on paper, you should increase the amount of space available for them to write.

Around the Table

You have now found and taken notes on at least five sources which provide information about the issue you are researching. Some of these sources may be articles, essays, or other texts; some may be interviews or observations. Some may be primary documents, videos, or other kinds of sources. After reading and thinking about them you have probably developed some opinions in response to the central question of this project:

“How and why should the law you studied be changed, repealed, continued or adopted?”

In the space below, describe the views that you have developed so far in response to this question.

Now imagine that the authors or central subjects of each of your sources are seated around a conference table. You present your position on the law to each of the authors of your sources. Now imagine how each one would respond to you. In the space below, write the name/names of each of these authors or subjects, and then summarize how they would respond to your position. Would each one agree with your position? Why? Disagree? Why? Want to qualify it in some way? Why and how? Write your imagined response from each author. For each author or subject, include one quote that connects with or supports how you think they would respond to your views.

On the basis of this imagined conversation between you and the authors you read, finesse or refine your views. Having thought about each of your sources in this way, is there any revision you want to make in your opinion? Explain below:

Now you are ready to argue your own position. Develop the case for your position by incorporating your thinking about the “conversations” you’ve had with the authors or subjects of your sources. In your paper, you should feel free to say things like, “_____ takes a similar position,” or “_____ offers a different perspective ...

Formative and Summative Assessment

Include measures for formatively assessing throughout the task. Include a detailed method of evaluation for the culminating task (e.g., rubric, checklist, etc.) that clearly communicates the expectations for success.

Formative assessment for reading and understanding legislation. (These annotation prompts can be applied to any piece of legislation you choose for students to read, or to legislation that they find themselves.)

1. Requirements that you feel would be expensive for a homeowner or builder to comply with.
2. Loopholes or exceptions to the law.
3. Words that are unfamiliar. If you find any of these, please look up the definition and include it in your margin notes.
4. Something that surprises you.

The following activities that are included with the formative/instructional activities can be used as formative assessments:

Formative Assessment for Developing and Using Models to Explain Phenomena and Applying systems thinking to understand the interaction and influence of related parts on each other, and on outcomes.

Modeling the Effects of Prohibition

Formative Assessments for Applying knowledge from various disciplines and contexts to real life situations. and Analyzing evaluating and synthesizing information from multiple sources to build on knowledge:

Research Planning Sheet

Student Notes in response to the Initial Research Questions

Student Notes in Response to Probing Questions

First Draft of Annotated Bibliography

Formative Assessments for Integrating Information:

Around The Table: Integrating Sources



This document was collaboratively created by the Vermont Agency of Education and the Great Schools Partnership, Inc, and is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).