

Pro/Con Research Topics

Directions: Read over the following topics. Then, select four that you are interested in researching. Write those four on your half sheet of paper.

At Issue: International Adoption

International, or intercountry, adoption is the process in which an individual or couple adopts a child from a different country through permanent legal means. The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption provides the international principles that govern intercountry adoption. International adoption is very popular in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2009, Americans adopted more children from other countries than the rest of the world combined. American families adopt children from places like Korea, India and Ethiopia. However, there has been a downward trend in recent years in international adoptions. Changes in international adoption policies made by countries to address problems in the adoption process account for some of the decrease in international adoptions. For example, allegations of child theft in Guatemala led to a two-year ban of international adoptions from that country. There has been much debate as to whether or not Americans should pursue adoptions from countries with known adoption regulation abuses. Proponents argue that American parents can provide a better future for many of these children. Opponents contend that the large number of prospective parents seeking to adopt encourages corruption in some countries.

Pro/Con and Essential Question:

Should Americans pursue adoptions from countries with known adoption regulation abuses?

At Issue: Advertising in Schools

Schools and school districts are turning to advertising in order to raise funds. Product advertisements can be found in a variety of formats in schools. They are frequently in stadiums, gyms, cafeterias, hallways, and textbook covers. In some school districts ads can be seen in school buses and even in student restrooms. Contracts with soft drink companies, for example, can net a school an average \$30 to \$35 per student annually, which can generate between \$100,000 and \$300,000 per year for a school district. Still, advertising in schools is a topic of debate. Many parents and student advocates think there should be a ban on advertising in schools. These opponents of ads in schools say schools should be free of commercialization. School administrators seeking to raise funds for schools argue, however, that schools need the added revenue brought in by advertising.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should there be a ban on advertising in schools?

At Issue: Advertising and Children

Broadcasting technology changed how advertising was delivered to the public. It also changed whom the advertising was delivered to. With the advent of television, which became highly commercialized in the 1950s, advertisers could market their commercial messages to many more market segments--including children. As a result, advertising has been heavily criticized. Consumer advocates have accused advertising of victimizing children too young to tell the difference between a sales pitch and disinterested advice. Recently, steps have been taken to limit how some products are presented during children's cartoons. The debate continues today as consumer advocates and advertisers argue whether restrictions should be placed on marketing that targets children. Those in favor of advertising restrictions believe that taking steps to protect children from some type of advertising would reduce unhealthy behavior in children. But those opposed to advertising restrictions argue that restrictions based on age would be a violation of children's consumer rights.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should restrictions be placed on marketing that targets children?

At Issue: Animal Cruelty

Animal cruelty is defined as inflicting suffering or harm upon animals for purposes other than self-defense. A wide range of actions from animal neglect to violence against animals can be considered animal cruelty. Animal rights activists contend that the use of animals for sports or entertainment can also be considered animal cruelty. They claim that activities such as horse racing, dogfighting and circuses cause animals to suffer needlessly in the name of entertainment. Others believe there is nothing wrong with using animals for entertainment purposes, as long as the animals are treated humanely. They contend that the animals are doing what they were born and bred to do.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does the use of animals for entertainment or gaming constitute animal cruelty?

At Issue: Animal Experimentation

The use of animals for scientific research dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Animal experimentation has led to the development of treatments for diabetes, anthrax, rabies, polio and smallpox, as well as anti-depressants, tranquilizers and antibiotics. Cancer chemotherapy, organ transplants, gene therapy, blood transfusions, cardiac pacemakers and the discovery of DNA are all linked to animal research. In 1966, the U.S. Congress passed the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) to ensure the welfare of animals-excluding birds and certain types of rats and mice--used in laboratory research. The Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for enforcing provisions of the AWA, and the National Institutes of Health reviews and approves biomedical research protocols with respect to the use of animals. In 1986, the British parliament passed a similar law to regulate the use of laboratory animals in the United Kingdom. Animal rights activists believe animal experimentation is not necessary for biomedical research. They argue that testing on animals is cruel and inhumane and leads to the needless suffering and death of millions of animals. Proponents of animal testing believe that the use of animals for biomedical research is needed in order to seek advances in human health.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should animals be used for biomedical research?

At Issue: Athletes' Pay

Professional sports generate huge revenues and many of the athletes that play them are being paid what some people consider to be outrageous salaries. New York Yankees baseball star Alex Rodriguez signed a contract in 2008 that will pay him \$275 million over the next ten years. Many other baseball, football, and basketball superstars enjoy multi-year contracts worth more than \$100 million. Because teams within a league must compete with each other to attract the best players, some professional sports leagues started to impose salary caps in the 1990s. A salary cap is a limit on the amount of money a team can spend on player salaries. Proponents of salary caps believe that they are a good way to control costs and create an even playing field for building a team. Opponents argue that salary caps are unfair to the athletes and only put more money in the pockets of owners and managers, when it is the athletes who do the hard work and risk injury in every game.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should leagues impose salary caps for athletes' pay?

At Issue: Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is defined as consuming a large number of alcoholic beverages in a short period of time with the primary intention of becoming intoxicated. This usually results in a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 or above, which for a typical adult corresponds to consuming 5 or more drinks in about 2 hours. This type of excessive alcohol consumption places a heavy burden on society through automobile crashes, reduced workplace productivity and increased risk of illness and disease. Studies have shown that binge drinking is more common in males, especially those in adolescence or young adulthood. Binge drinking has been recognized as a major problem on college campuses. It is estimated that approximately 50 percent of male college students and approximately 40 percent of female college students engage in binge drinking. This has led some groups to call for campus-wide restrictions on alcohol use to prevent binge drinking. They assert this will save lives and have a positive impact on the campus community at large. Opponents of campus-wide restrictions believe this would only push binge drinking underground. They instead advocate for education programs on the dangers of alcohol abuse.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should colleges implement campus-wide restrictions on alcohol use to prevent binge drinking?

At Issue: Genetic Engineering

Genetic engineering or recombinant DNA technology involves altering the genetic structure of a plant, animal or food product to provide it with specific traits. With the success of the Human Genome Project, scientists have been able to manipulate genes to treat and prevent diseases, create organs for human transplant, develop transgenic animals and manufacture food for human consumption. The Grocery Manufacturers of America estimates that between 70-75 percent of all processed foods available in grocery stores contain ingredients from genetically modified plants. Supporters of genetic engineering technology claim that it will lead to medical breakthroughs that will cure diseases and allow humans to live longer. They also cite the benefits of using genetically engineered plants to produce more food while using less resources to feed the world's growing population. Opponents voice concerns over ethics, safety, long-term health effects and the impact on the environment as reasons why genetic engineering should be limited.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should genetic engineering be permitted?

At Issue: Beauty Pageants

A beauty pageant is a competition judged mainly on a contestant's physical beauty. The origin of the modern beauty pageant era can be traced to the first Miss America pageant which was held in 1921. Miss Universe and Miss USA soon followed, and by the 1960s, beauty pageants were firmly entrenched in American culture. Proponents of beauty pageants say contestants develop self-esteem and confidence. However, critics contend that beauty contests reinforce the idea that a woman should be valued for her physical appearance and promote an unrealistic expectation of beauty. With the increased popularity of plastic surgery procedures, many are now contemplating what impact this has on beauty pageants. Some propose banning contestants who have undergone cosmetic surgery from competing in pageants, while others say plastic surgery is part of the new reality of competition.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does competing in beauty pageants adversely affect a child's development?

At Issue: Plastic Surgery

Plastic surgery is a special type of surgery that deals with the reconstruction of the face and body and can be used to improve a person's ability to function as well as their appearance and self-image. The word "plastic" comes from the Greek *plastikos* meaning to mold or to shape. Reconstructive procedures alter or repair defects on the face or body. These include birth defects such as cleft lips and palates and ear deformities, traumatic injuries like those from dog bites or severe burns, or breast reconstruction for cancer patients. Cosmetic procedures alter a part of the body that the person would like to improve or change. Common cosmetic procedures include breast augmentation, rhinoplasty, and liposuction. The decision to have cosmetic surgery is a highly personal one. Some support that decision because they feel the mental health benefits outweigh the risks of the procedure. Others feel that the mental health boost associated with cosmetic surgery will only provide short-term satisfaction, while the cosmetic change is permanent.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does cosmetic surgery have mental health benefits?

At Issue: Child Labor

Child labor, a major issue in the developing world, can be defined as work performed by a child under age 18 that is hazardous or harmful to his or her health and development and likely interferes with his or her education. According to the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), approximately 158 million children aged 5-14 years are engaged in child labor. The majority of child laborers live in Asia. Opponents of child labor argue that denying children their civil right to a full-time education by forcing them to work only serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Supporters of children working agree that the exploitation of children is wrong but respond that in some cases, children are forced to work out of necessity and provide their families with much needed income.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should there be exceptions to child labor laws?

At Issue: Convicted Felons

The practice of placing restrictions on convicted felons can be traced to ancient times in Greece and Rome, medieval Europe and in the common law of early England. Today in the United States the practice continues. Many states have constitutional or statutory provisions to disqualify convicted felons from holding or retaining public office. However, there is no provision in the U.S. Constitution that prohibits convicted felons from being elected to national level public office. The Gun Control Act of 1968 bans convicted felons from possessing firearms. Another possible consequence of committing a felony is the loss of the right to vote, or disenfranchisement. Kentucky and Virginia, which have the most restrictive disenfranchisement measures in the nation, permanently deny the right to vote for nearly all convicted felons. Some of the disenfranchisement laws stem from Reconstruction-era policies that were designed to reduce the voting power of African-Americans. According to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, nationwide there are 5.3 million American citizens who are denied the right to vote because of a criminal conviction, and a disproportionate number of these citizens are minorities. Opponents of felon disenfranchisement argue that convicted felons have paid their debt to society while proponents contend that lawbreakers should not help elect the country's lawmakers.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should felons be allowed to vote after they have served their time?

At Issue: Cursive Writing

Cursive writing is a style of penmanship that joins letters in a flowing script. Most schools begin teaching cursive writing in the second or third grade and continue it until the fifth or sixth grade. However, as more states adopt the Common Core Curriculum Standards—which do not require the teaching of handwriting—educators are debating the importance of teaching it. Some teachers think that the art of handwriting is still essential and that students should be able to read cursive documents as well. Others think that the emphasis in school should be on developing keyboard proficiency and concentrating on those subject areas that are measured on state standardized tests.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should cursive writing still be taught in schools?

At Issue: Cybercrime

Cybercrime refers to any illegal activity that involves the use of a computer or the Internet. Hacking, copyright infringement, the distribution of child pornography, fraud, and financial theft are computer crimes that receive a lot of media attention and reach beyond our borders to the international community. The threat of cyberterrorism—the deliberate, large-scale disruption of computer networks—has been a national security concern since the 2001 terror attacks on the U.S. However, it is identity theft that is one of the fastest growing computer crimes in the U.S. Identity theft is the criminal act of acquiring or exploiting personal information that is legally assigned to another individual. This can include, but is not limited to, a person's name, address, Social Security number, driver's license number, bank account numbers, credit or work history. The prevalence of this crime is a result of many factors, including the abundance of personal information available to sophisticated criminals via the Internet. Fraudulent use of stolen personal information allows criminals to assume the identity of the victim for their own financial gain. It can take years to repair the damage done to one's credit and return to good financial standing. The U.S. government has recognized a responsibility to protect citizens from identity theft and has recruited the postal service, FBI, Secret Service, and Federal Trade Commission to join in the effort to detect and prevent the crime. In addition, many companies are taking it upon themselves to implement improved security measures that will protect against unlawful access to their databases.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should companies that store personal digital data be subject to federal regulation?

At Issue: Divorce

Divorce is the legal and final dissolution of a marriage. There are a variety of reasons why people make the decision to divorce. Therapists cite problems with couples growing apart, feeling unloved and unappreciated, and troubles with finances as the top reasons for divorce. Divorce dates back as far as the seventeenth century when the Puritans decided that marriage was a civil contract that could be broken under certain circumstances, including adultery, cruelty and long absence. Although both men and women were eligible to receive divorces, men were the chief beneficiaries of this law because of the double standard of the time. Current divorce laws differ from state to state and country to country, with some countries either not allowing the practice or denying the right to women. Religious beliefs also have an impact upon whether a person will be allowed to divorce and remarry. Children are often a major factor in whether a couple will decide to divorce. Those in favor of divorce say that it is pointless to stay in an unhappy marriage while those who are opposed argue that society would benefit if families stayed together.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should laws be enacted that make divorce harder to obtain?

At Issue: Economic Inequality

Over the past several decades, economic inequality--the disparity between the wealth and income of the richest people in a country and the wealth and income of the poorest people--has risen around the world. In the United States, in particular, economic inequality is at an all-time high. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the average income of the top 10% of Americans in 2008 was nearly 15 times higher than that of the bottom 10%. The financial crisis of 2007-2009 further widened the gap between the rich and poor. Proponents of Keynesian economics--a school of macroeconomic thought based on the ideas of economist John Maynard Keynes--argue that economic inequality can be addressed by taxing the rich and expanding government programs to increase jobs. Advocates of supply-side economics--a school of macroeconomic thought developed in response to Keynesian economics--contend that taxes should be reduced for the rich, encouraging the rich to invest and produce economic activity that will trickle down to the poor.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the rich pay more in taxes?

At Issue: Electoral College

The Electoral College is made up of representatives chosen by the voters every four years to elect the president and vice president of the U.S. These representatives meet after the popular vote to cast ballots in the electoral vote. The Electoral College, not the public, actually cast the votes that elect the president and the vice president of the U.S. Electors are pledged in advance to vote for the candidate of their party, which makes the vote of the Electoral College largely a formality. In most elections, the candidate who wins the popular vote will usually win the electoral vote, but there have been four exceptions. In the elections of 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000, the candidates who won the elections won fewer popular votes but more electoral votes than their opponents. As a result, the validity of the Electoral College has been disputed. Proponents of the Electoral College say it preserves the role of all states and their voters in presidential elections. But critics of the Electoral College see it as an obstruction to a pure democracy.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the Electoral College be preserved?

At Issue: Green Movement

The Green Movement supports environmentally-friendly practices and products as opposed to those that harm or pollute the environment. Environmental awareness increased during the 1960s as environmentalists petitioned the federal government to raise the standards for clean air and water in order to protect forests, animals and plant life. The nation celebrated the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. The 2006 release of former Vice President Al Gore's documentary on global warming renewed interest in environmental issues and marked a concerted effort by Americans to "go green." Many consumers now demand sustainable and environmentally-friendly products as they seek to reduce their carbon footprint and conserve natural resources. However, critics contend a green lifestyle does not help the environment because there is no formal definition for what constitutes "green."

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does a green lifestyle help the environment?

At Issue: Extraterrestrial Life

Extraterrestrial life is life that does not originate from Earth. It is unknown whether or not life exists on other planets in our solar system or beyond, but research scientists with organizations such as the Planetary Society and the SETI Institute do conduct searches for extraterrestrial life. NASA has sent missions to Mars to try to determine if life exists on the planet, but has not found definitive evidence one way or the other. Some scientists feel that the universe is so vast, it is improbable for life not to exist elsewhere. They believe Venus, Mars and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn are the most likely places to harbor life in our solar system. Others contend that if life existed elsewhere in the universe, we would have found it by now. They believe Earth is the only planet capable of supporting life.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Is it possible life exists on other planets?

At Issue: Famine

The first of the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2000, was a promise to fight poverty and reduce the number of people suffering from hunger from 850 million to 425 million by 2015. But by 2008 the number of people suffering from hunger actually rose to 950 million. It is estimated that 40,000 people die each day from hunger and nutrition-related illnesses. Some say the best way to way reduce the number of chronically hungry people worldwide is for the developed world to increase food aid to famished regions. But others disagree by saying that more food aid is not the best way of reducing world hunger. They point to a strategy based on infrastructure and democracy so as to establish a system that eliminates hunger on a global level.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the developed world increase food aid to famished regions?

At Issue: Food Safety

Threats to food safety are wide-ranging, such as the dangers associated with salmonella, listeria and other foodborne illnesses; mercury contamination of seafood; a rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria from the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in animal farming and the presence of harmful industrial chemicals in imported ingredients. In the United States, the federal government--through agencies including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)--is responsible for ensuring the safety of the nation's food supply. However, lapses in food safety do still occur. Critics contend that due to influence from food industry lobbyists, the federal government is not doing enough to keep the food supply safe. Officials with the FDA and USDA claim protecting the public's health is their top priority, and President Barack Obama has proclaimed it "unacceptable" when food represents a hazard to public health.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Is the federal government doing enough to ensure the safety of the nation's food supply?

At Issue: Hunting

Hunting is the practice of pursuing and killing live animals for food, recreation or trade. Early human civilizations were organized around a "hunter-gatherer" lifestyle that relied on hunting for subsistence. As civilizations evolved and became more advanced, hunting shifted from a necessary activity to a social one throughout much of the world. Advocates of hunting claim that hunting is an important component of managing wildlife populations. However, hunting opponents argue that more hunting regulations are needed to prevent animals from being hunted into extinction.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Are animals being hunted into extinction?

At Issue: Military Recruiting

The United States discontinued compulsory military service-also known as the draft-and moved to an all-volunteer military force in 1973. All branches of the military employ recruiters to maintain and build their forces. While recruitment efforts have always focused on young people, the prolonged U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to criticism of the recruitment of teenagers. A provision of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act requires high schools that receive federal funding provide information on students to military recruiters, unless the student or parent opts out, which some claim is an invasion of privacy. Some people believe that military recruiters should be allowed in schools because students need to be aware of career opportunities and other benefits the military has to offer. Others feel that high school students are too immature and impressionable to make a decision about joining the military. Counter-recruitment organizations, like the American Friends Service Committee and the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, also oppose the presence of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs in high schools. These programs are rapidly expanding, especially in urban areas with low-income and minority students. Although military enlistment is not mandatory for those students enrolled in JROTC, those opposed to these programs claim that they unfairly target poor and minority students for military recruitment.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the U.S. military target teenagers in its recruitment efforts?

At Issue: Music Lyrics

Music lyrics have changed drastically since the traditions of the troubadour in the middle ages and even since the early days of rock 'n' roll. Heavy metal and rap lyrics have caused concern among parents and community advocates who say lyrics have become increasingly explicit, especially with reference to sex, drugs, and violence. In 1990, as a response to the growing concern over music lyrics, the Recording Industry Association of America instituted an advisory sticker policy. The label reads "Parental Advisory--Explicit Lyrics" and is placed on recordings whose lyrics deal with sex, violence, suicide, drug use, bigotry, and Satanism. Critics say the label is not enough to stop lyrics from reaching and negatively affecting children. But those who defend music lyrics argue that the concern over explicit lyrics is exaggerated, adding that much of the music available to children has elements of creativity and positivity.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Are the lyrics of popular music harmful to children's development?

At Issue: Organ Donation

Organ donation is the process of removing tissues and organs from a human body for the purposes of transplanting. The majority of organ donations come from deceased donors rather than living donors. In the United States, each state is responsible for regulating organ donation within the limits of the federal National Organ Transplant Act of 1984 which outlawed the sale of human organs. Each state does require that a donor issues a statement at some point during their lifetime that they are willing to be an organ donor. The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) maintains the organ transplant list. The number of people on that list who need transplants greatly outnumbers the number of available organs. To address this shortfall, some have advocated allowing transplant patients to pay a willing donor for their organs. They contend this will increase the supply of organs available for transplant. Medical ethicists oppose the practice of paying for organ donations. They feel the sale of human organs would greatly favor wealthy patients over poorer patients.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the sale of human organs be legal?

At Issue: Outsourcing

Outsourcing, also termed offshoring or contracting out, is defined as the practice of subcontracting work to outside and especially foreign or nonunion companies. In light of a weakened U.S. economy and high unemployment rates, the debate over outsourcing is a controversial and divisive issue. While not a new phenomenon, the current controversy seems to be fueled by the addition of white-collar jobs to what has historically been limited to semi-skilled or unskilled labor. In 2006, the Hackett Group released a report stating that the typical Fortune 500 company could save \$116 million a year by transferring jobs abroad. Proponents of outsourcing say it helps companies remain competitive in the global marketplace, adding that globalization helps consumers through cheaper products and services. Critics of outsourcing argue, however, that outsourcing leads to the loss of intellectual assets to overseas operations and the loss of jobs for U.S. workers.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does outsourcing hurt the economy?

At Issue: Overpopulation

It is estimated that by the onset of the 22nd century (2100), the population of the United States will eclipse 1 billion people; roughly triple the figure in 2008. At nearly 304 million, America is presently the third most populous nation in the world behind China (1.3 billion) and India (1.1 billion). Some researchers fear that the effects of unregulated population growth could lead to the world population outgrowing the sustaining capacity of the earth, resulting in great famines, war, deforestation, pandemic diseases and insufficient supplies of drinking water. Others believe that overpopulation is a myth rather than a reality. They reject that notion that an increasing population will lead to doomsday scenarios and are more concerned about a possible "birth dearth" than an impending population crisis.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should strict population control measures be enacted to protect the environment?

At Issue: Patients' Rights

Patients' rights are guaranteed by federal law. Some states have additional laws protecting patients' rights. Some health care providers have a patients' bill of rights, which state the rights to which patients are entitled as recipients of medical care. Some rights, such as the right to access their own medical records and the right to keep medical records private, are universally accepted. Others, like a patient's right to refuse treatment, however, are not--especially if the patient is a minor. Children's advocates say a minor's decision to refuse treatment should not weigh any less than that of an adult. Those who disagree, however, point out that in some cases a minor may not be mature enough to understand the risks associated with refusing treatment.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does an ill minor have the right to refuse treatment?

At Issue: Vaccines for Kids

Vaccines offer improved immunity to certain diseases. Edward Jenner is credited with developing the first successful vaccine--for smallpox--in the 1790s. By the twentieth century, several successful vaccines were introduced, including those for diphtheria, measles, mumps and rubella. In order to provide the best protection against diseases, it is recommended that infants and children receive vaccinations as soon as their immune systems are sufficiently developed. The Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention advises parents to follow a strict vaccination schedule, and

all 50 states require certain vaccinations for children entering public school. While states will grant vaccination exemptions for medical or religious reasons, some parents seek exemptions due to safety concerns. They feel that due to potential health risks associated with vaccines, they should be permitted to decide if or when to vaccinate their child. Others argue that granting exemptions from vaccination puts public health at risk and could lead to a resurgence of dangerous diseases like measles or whooping cough.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should parents be permitted to opt out of required vaccinations for their children?

Topic Overview: World Conflicts

Since the beginning of civilization, nations and city-states have engaged in battles, wars and other armed conflicts. Today, most conflicts occur within nations, are sometimes divided among ethnic and/or religious lines and often involve fighting in civilian areas. In Afghanistan, ethnically based guerilla groups struggle to seize control of the national government. Colombia's civil war, which has roots in Spanish colonialism, involves a dispute between parties with vastly different ideas about the way Colombia's land and resources should be divided among its people. Iraqis are suffering the effects of a brutal insurgency as well as a bloody sectarian conflict. Palestinians want to reclaim some of the land that was once theirs. At the heart of many current conflicts is whether a people's right to self-determination outweighs the state's right to rule. Ethnic, national and religious self-determination movements have led to conflicts in Basque country, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, and Chechnya, among others. Often these conflicts involve human rights violations and terrorist violence, resulting in threats to regional peace and security. As such, few internal wars today take place without foreign intervention. International organizations such as the United Nations address calls for intervention, and humanitarian laws from the Geneva Conventions and other protocols are used to both protect noncombatants and outline provisions for the humane treatment of prisoners of war.

*** If interested in this topic, narrow the scope by choosing one of the following: Northern Ireland, Chechnya, Columbia, or Darfur. We will look at essential questions from there.

At Issue: Tanning Salons

Throughout history, sun tanned skin has gone in and out of fashion. Before the 1920s, tanned skin was seen as a symbol of the lower class because it was associated with working outside in the sun. To avoid being associated with a lower class, women took steps to artificially lighten their skin tone. Attitudes began to change after the 1920s. Tanning became a fashionable trend as people sought to emulate the caramel-colored skin of Parisian singer Josephine Baker. By the 1940s, magazines began to encourage sunbathing and promoted sun tanned skin as fashionable and healthy. Tanning is still in fashion today, and the business of tanning is a multibillion dollar industry. Tanning beds and tanning salons have exploded in popularity as a way for individuals-especially teenagers--to have sun tanned skin year round. However, with the increased use of tanning salons has come an increase in skin cancers among teens. This has led some states to propose or enact bills restricting the use of tanning beds by minors. Some organizations such as the American Medical Association have gone a step further by supporting a federal ban against the use of tanning salons by those under the age of 18. Supporters of a ban claim it will reduce the risk of skin cancer and save lives. Opponents argue that a ban infringes on a teenager's personal freedom, and the use of a tanning salon by a minor should be up to the parents, not the government.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should a federal ban against the use of tanning salons by minors be enacted?

At Issue: Stock Markets

A stock exchange, or stock market, is a place where stocks of publicly held corporations are bought and sold, also known as trading. Trading at a stock market is done by members who hold a seat on that exchange. These seat-holders can act as brokers for investors who are not members of that stock exchange. The world's largest exchanges are the New York Stock Exchange, the Tokyo Stock Exchange, the NASDAQ (New York), Euronext (Paris), and the London Stock Exchange. With the recent global financial crisis, stock markets came under public scrutiny for unregulated practices. Critics of these practices called on regulators to impose bans on some practices, such as short selling, that might distort market prices. Opponents of imposed bans argue that the practices in question are an important part of trading strategy and should not be regulated.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should stock market regulators impose bans on short selling?

At Issue: Nuclear Energy

Nuclear energy is produced by splitting uranium atoms which releases energy in the form of heat. The energy is collected and used to produce steam from water and drive a turbine which is then used to generate power. The United States produces the most nuclear energy, with nuclear power providing 20% of the country's electricity. Worldwide there are more than 400 nuclear plants operating in 31 countries. In many of these countries, nuclear energy plays an even larger role in producing electricity than in the U.S. If properly contained, nuclear energy has a relatively low impact on the environment and is fairly clean and efficient. However, nuclear energy does produce waste byproducts that remain radioactive for thousands of years. The U.S. Department of Energy's plans to store this nuclear waste deep in the earth in Yucca Mountain, Nevada, has been met with legal challenges. There are also fears about the safety and security of the nation's nuclear power facilities, which could be a target for terrorists.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Is nuclear energy a safe form of energy?

At Issue: Minimum Wage

Roman Catholic clergyman John Ryan wrote his doctorate thesis on the right of the worker in 1906. He wrote that the government like the church had a responsibility to the worker. Ryan argued that a living wage was a basic right of the worker, not a benefit. He also described the living wage as a national minimum wage. By 1920 more than a dozen U.S. states had enacted some minimum wage standard. In 1933 the National Industrial Recovery Act established a minimum wage, but it was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935. In 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act successfully re-established a national minimum wage. In July 2009, the minimum wage was increased from \$6.55 to \$7.25. Critics of the minimum wage say it is not sufficient. They argue that the minimum wage should be changed to a living wage standard, which takes into account economic factors that determine a wage that is sufficient to provide the necessities and essential comforts needed for an acceptable standard of living. But opponents of the living wage standard say that such a change would have adverse effects on the economy.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should the minimum wage be raised?

At Issue: Media Bias

Media bias is the presence of partiality within the mass media. The term media bias is often used to refer specifically to political positions taken by journalists and news organizations that might contravene ethical standards of journalism. In the American political climate of blue states-red states, more people--and ultimately, more news organizations--are being categorized as liberal or conservative. This socially divided spectrum adds to the presence of partiality within the mass media. Critics of media bias often perceive the mainstream as having a liberal bias. These critics cite the lack of conservative reporters in newsrooms as a possible source of liberal bias. But those who defend the media as an impartial messenger point out that it might be the viewers' own biases that create a perception of a liberal media bias.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Do the mainstream media have a liberal bias?

At Issue: Internment

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all people have a right to a fair trial. However, many countries, including the United States, have been criticized for holding detainees without due process. Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared a War on Terror. The United States military was deployed to Afghanistan to destroy terrorist networks. While Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the attacks was not captured, hundreds of people suspected of being al-Qaeda terrorists were caught. The Bush Administration airlifted the detainees to the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, calling them unlawful combatants, and thus not entitled to prisoner of war rights and protections found under the Geneva Convention of 1949. The U.S. government argued that human rights law did not apply to detainees held in Guantanamo Bay, and that they could be held indefinitely. In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* that the detainees are entitled to minimal protections listed under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention. However, as recently as January 2010, a Justice Department-led task force recommended holding 50 of the detainees indefinitely and without trial. Civil liberties groups are opposed the indefinite detention of the detainees, arguing that it violates human rights laws. Proponents of indefinite detention contend that it is in the interest of national security.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does the United States have the right to detain terrorism suspects indefinitely?

At Issue: Genocide

The term genocide--the deliberate destruction of a political, religious, racial or ethnic group--was introduced in the 1940s by a lawyer named Raphael Lemkin in his efforts to describe the Nazi policies of systematic murder of Jews and other groups during the Holocaust. While the term genocide is of recent coinage, there have been records of the mass slaughter of peoples from ancient civilizations to the 21st century. The Bible's Old Testament describes the genocide of the Amalekite and Midianite peoples and invokes God's name as justification for their slaughter. In the 13th century, Genghis Khan ordered his Mongol horsemen to kill entire nations, leaving behind nothing but empty ruins and bones. In 1948, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, making genocide an international crime. There has been much debate among academic scholars and within international organizations and governments over the tension between state sovereignty and outside intervention. Proponents of outside intervention in nations where genocide is taking place believe that protecting the rights of individuals is more important than respecting the sovereignty of a nation. They believe that increased deaths and suffering are the result of time wasted debating the definition of genocide and mulling over whether a very grave situation merits outside help. Opponents to outside intervention argue that the international community has the obligation of respecting the autonomy of sovereign states. Some critics fear that outside intervention can become no better than the colonial imperialism and can do more harm than good.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Does the global community have a responsibility to intervene in states committing genocide?

At Issue: Second Amendment and the Right to Bear Arms

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed." The first time the U.S. Supreme Court directly addressed the Second Amendment occurred in 1939 in *United States v. Miller*. In *Miller*, the Court held that the mandatory registration of shotguns required by the National Firearms Act is constitutional. In *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008), the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a ban on handguns in Washington, D.C., marking the second time that the Court has directly weighed in on scope of the Second Amendment. The Court held in *Heller* that an individual had the right to possess and carry a firearm unconnected with militia service. The *Heller* decision does not settle the gun-control debate. Many questions remain about gun-control policies. Gun-control advocates cite the high crime rate and death toll from gun-related violence as evidence that tougher laws are needed. They call for limits on the types of weapons civilians can own and stricter weapons registration and training requirements. Opponents to gun-control laws argue "guns don't kill people, people kill people." They say citizens have a constitutional right to bear arms for hunting and self-defense. Additionally, many opponents argue that gun-control legislation, such as the federal assault weapons ban, is ineffective and unenforceable due to loopholes in the laws.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should gun regulations be tightened?

At Issue: Paying for Grades

School districts around the country are experimenting with programs that give students cash rewards for attending school, getting good grades, and performing well on standardized tests. Supporters of these programs think the financial incentives will motivate students to go to school and study, especially in poor and minority neighborhoods. Those opposed to paying students for good grades or school attendance believe that it sends the wrong message to students about their responsibility to learn. They argue that the money invested in these programs could be better used to improve education. While some districts using cash award programs have seen improvements in attendance and performance, the long-term impact of such programs is unknown.

Pro/Con and Essential Question: Should students be paid for good grades?