

Should the United States reduce immigration?

“The Congress shall have power...To establish a uniform rule of naturalization...”

- Article I, Section 8, Clause 4

From the time of America’s founding, immigration has been crucial to the nation’s growth, as well as a periodic source of conflict. Recent debate over immigration has polarized the nation, sparking rallies and marches, prompting congressional hearings, presidential initiatives and proposed legislation to reform what is widely considered an ineffective U.S. immigration system.

Approximately 24 million legal immigrants and an estimated 12 million unauthorized immigrants live and work in the United States, the highest level since the 1920s. National debate has focused on the public costs associated with the new generation of immigrant workers and the contributions that they make to our country.



Those who support lenient immigration reform, including a means for immigrants who enter the country illegally to become citizens, say vast numbers of undocumented immigrants are law-abiding, hardworking people who make the country stronger and more economically prosperous by paying taxes and taking undesirable, low-income jobs. Those who favor reduced immigration say that a large proportion of recent immigrants are low-skilled workers who take away jobs from U.S. citizens and overwhelm government agencies that provide education, public assistance and medical care.

Now it’s your turn to answer the question:

Should the United States reduce immigration?

YES

- The U.S. needs to secure its borders. Offering immigrants who enter the country illegally a pathway to citizenship rewards law-breaking, encourages more illegal immigration, and threatens national security.
- Immigrants, both legal and illegal, lower wages and take away jobs from American-born workers.
- New immigration has been an economic burden to public services, schools, and hospitals and should be discouraged.
- The U.S. cannot provide refuge for all the people in the world who need a safe place. Other countries should assume more of the responsibility.

NO

- The U.S. could better secure its borders by documenting all foreign-born workers. It would be impossible to identify and deport 12 million undocumented immigrants.
- Immigrants have helped make the U.S. the leader in technological innovation, and they take jobs that many American-born workers do not want.
- New immigration has added to the continual growth and prosperity of our nation and should be encouraged.
- Many immigrants flee to the U.S. to escape oppressive and life-threatening situations in their home country. We are a wealthy nation with a moral obligation to provide asylum to anyone who needs it.

INTRODUCTION

Grades:
High School

Classroom Time:
45 minutes

Constitution Connections:
Article I Section 8 Clause 4

Materials:

- Student Handout 1
- Student Handout 2
- Student Handout 3
- Student Worksheet

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About this lesson

This research and deliberation activity is designed to encourage students to look at the issue of immigration reform from different points of view. Then, through deliberation, they will find political measures to address the issue. In any deliberation activity, compromise and listening will play a key role in finding common ground.

Objectives

Students will be able to evaluate multiple points of view on the issue of immigration and determine what can be done to find common ground between those who have differing views on how U.S. immigration policies should be reformed.

What is deliberation?

The framers of the Constitution envisioned deliberation among a diverse citizenry who disagreed on issues because they felt that only through compromise could Americans find ways to promote the common good.

Deliberation is often confused with debate, but the two are different. Debate creates a dichotomy while deliberation allows for careful consideration of many points of view, so the best choice can be made. Essentially, debate is competitive, focusing on who is right and who is wrong, while deliberation allows for compromise and consensus.

Deliberation is focused around an issue, generally laws or policy, though it can also include public behavior and cultural practices. The Town Hall Wall deliberation method offers multiple points of view and then encourages a conversation around the pros and cons of each perspective.

Resources

Links to the documents used in this lesson and extension readings for this lesson are available at the National Constitution Center's website at: www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange.

OPENING: TOWN HALL WALL

1. Display the **Town Hall Wall** poster so all of your students can see it. Next, have them read the description of the issue and the question. Give each student a sticky note and instruct them to write **Yes** or **No** to answer the question, and place it on the Town Hall Wall poster in the appropriate column.

Q: Should the United States reduce immigration?

Students answer **Yes** or **No**.

VALUES: CONSTITUTION AND QUOTES

2. Pass out **Student Handout 1** and have students read it. As a class, review the guidelines for deliberations and discuss the idea of using values in deliberations.
3. Distribute **Student Handout 2**. Have students read the handout and circle or write in the margins words that reflect the values expressed in Article I of the Constitution and the quotes.
4. Ask your students to share with the class the values they found that were reflected in **Student Handout 2**. Record their answers for the class to see. If the same values are given more than once, then mark them with a star to determine the values with which the majority of the class agrees. These values will be used in Step 7.

POINTS OF VIEW

5. Pass out **Student Handout 3**. Have students read each of the four Points of View and circle which they support (students may choose more than one).
6. Provide each student with the **Student Worksheet** and instruct them to complete it.

DELIBERATION

7. Ask your students the following questions. Record their answers for the class to see.

A. What values are evident in each Point of View?

Have students refer to values that were discussed with **Student Handout 2** and categorize these values under the applicable Point of View. Some values will apply to more than one Point of View. If the same values are given more than once, mark them with a star to determine the values with which the majority of the class agrees.

B. In your opinion, what is the most serious potential consequence of each Point of View?

Students should cite consequences from **Student Handout 3** or share any other potential consequences they have thought of.

C. What values do the Points of View have in common?

Use values that have previously been listed to help students find common ground.

D. What tensions or conflicts exist between the Points of View?

Ask your students to compare the lists of values to identify the tensions and conflicts.

E. What compromises are supporters of each of the Points of View willing to make?

Ask students to use evidence and values that were previously listed to support their answers.

F. How should the U.S. reform its immigration policies? Explain your answer.

Students should use evidence and values that were previously listed to support their answers.

DEBRIEFING: COMPROMISE STATEMENT

Work together to craft a class Compromise Statement, which is a statement that is negotiated among supporters of each perspective, based on values that all the perspectives have in common. For their Compromise Statement, encourage the class to work to answer the question posed at the start of the lesson: "**Should the United States reduce immigration?**" The statement should also include the values all the perspectives have in common, and evidence that supports each perspective.

Class **Compromise Statements** can be uploaded to: www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange for students around the country to view as part of our ongoing conversation at **The Exchange**.

MODIFICATION

To find primary source research documents about this issue, go to www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange, click on the link for "Should the United States reduce immigration?" and download Research Documents Sets 1, 2, and 3.

STUDENT HANDOUT 1

ADVICE TO STUDENTS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL DELIBERATION

The National Constitution Center is located in Philadelphia, just a few hundred yards from Independence Hall where the Constitution of the United States was written and signed during the summer of 1787. The men who came to Philadelphia that summer did so because they knew the direction of the country they loved needed to change. They deliberated for nearly four months and created a document that none thought was perfect. But they put forward a challenge to future generations: keep working towards the creation of a “more perfect Union.” The Center was created to support this challenge and encourages students to walk in the steps of the founders and deliberate the future of our country.

The guidelines presented below have been created to provide you with advice and ideas on how to both present your arguments and hear those of others. The advice below was inspired by the rules adopted by the Constitutional Convention, as presented by George Wyeth of Virginia on May 28, 1787.

- Think through your idea before presenting it to the group; you may wish to make a few notes on paper to ensure your idea is clear.
- Listen carefully to other ideas and consider how to incorporate them into your own.
- When you are not speaking, do not have other side conversations, read a book or document, or in another way distract the speaker.
- When challenging an idea, focus on the idea, not the person you are challenging.
- Use the Constitution as support for your ideas; refer to the text and use it as a tool to support your argument.
- Do not dominate the conversation, and do not speak more than twice before allowing everyone else the opportunity to be heard.
- Present your ideas directly to the facilitator or group leader.
- When developing your argument, consider the position of the other side, and use these ideas to support or build compromise into your position.
- Wait to be acknowledged by the facilitator before speaking.

VALUES

The U.S. Constitution is one of our nation’s founding documents. We look to it to understand the supreme law of the land. But we can also read it to discover the values of our democracy, values such as equality, freedom, individual rights, justice, the rule of law, and security.

While constitutional values bind us all as Americans, their application to particular issues is frequently subject to sharp debate. Moreover, values are sometimes in competition. Competing values should be considered in your deliberation—even if they create tension.

In a deliberation it is important to consider the basic values that should be upheld by everyone. By considering a variety of values, we can understand each other better, find common ground, and come up with a shared set of ideas that will guide everyone’s perspective about an issue. As your class discusses the perspectives, you may find yourself agreeing with more than one of them. Feel free to combine perspectives, and to describe new perspectives.

STUDENT HANDOUT 2

The Constitution

Article I, Section 8, Clause 4 “The Congress shall have power...To establish a uniform rule of naturalization...”

To learn more, visit the National Constitution Center’s Interactive Constitution at:
<http://constitutioncenter.org/constitution>

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

It is no doubt very desirable that we should hold out as many inducements as possible for the worthy part of mankind to come and settle amongst us, and throw their fortunes into a common lot with ours. But why is this desirable? Not merely to swell the catalogue of people. No, sir, it is to increase the wealth and strength of the community; and those who acquire the rights of citizenship, without adding to the strength or wealth of the community, are not the people we are in want of.

I should be exceedingly sorry, sir, that our rule of naturalization excluded a single person of good fame that really meant to incorporate himself into our society; on the other hand, I do not wish that any man should acquire the privilege, but such as would be a real addition to the wealth or strength of the United States.

—James Madison, member of the First U.S. Congress from Virginia (1790)

James Madison, *The Writings of James Madison, comprising his Public Papers and his Private Correspondence, including his numerous letters and documents now for the first time printed*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1900). Vol. 5. Chapter: *SPEECHES IN THE FIRST CONGRESS—SECOND SESSION, 1790*. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1937/118902> on 2009-07-06

I’ve spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don’t know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That’s how I saw it, and see it still.

—President Ronald Reagan (1989)

President Ronald Reagan’s Farewell Address to the Nation. January 11, 1989. Accessed from <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm> on 2009-07-06

The simple fact is that we must not, and we will not, surrender our borders to those who wish to exploit our history of compassion and justice. We cannot tolerate those who traffic in human cargo, nor can we allow our people to be endangered by those who would enter our country to terrorize Americans. But the solution to the problem of illegal immigration is not simply to close our borders. The solution is to welcome legal immigrants and legal legitimate refugees and to turn away those who do not obey the laws. We must say no to illegal immigration so we can continue to say yes to legal immigration.

—President Bill Clinton (1993)

President Bill Clinton’s Press Conference on Immigration Policy. August 2, 1993. Accessed from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2889/is_n30_v29/ai_14415295/ on 2009-07-06

For more than two centuries, this nation has been a beacon of hope and opportunity – a place that has drawn enterprising men and women from around the world who have sought to build a life as good as their talents and their hard work would allow. And generation after generation of immigrants have come to these shores because they believe that in America all things are possible.

—President Barack Obama (2009)

Speech by President Obama at a naturalization ceremony for active duty service members. May 1, 2009. Accessed from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/05/01/My-Fellow-Americans/> on 2009-07-06

STUDENT HANDOUT 3

Point of View 1

Federal immigration legislation enacted in 1986, 1990 and 1996 all failed to stem the flow of unauthorized immigrants because their initiatives were never fully funded or adequately enforced. Employers were able to hire cheaper immigrant labor and more immigrants, legal and unauthorized, flowed into the U.S. The federal government just needs to properly fund and implement existing initiatives. Effective immigration policies already exist and more laws are unnecessary.

Potential Negative Consequences

The total number of undocumented immigrants and highly skilled guest workers in the U.S. may remain unknown.

An illegal market for moving people across U.S. borders will continue to thrive if existing laws are not enforced.

States will have to spend more money to provide services for immigrants who enter the country illegally.

Point of View 2

The only way to know how many unauthorized immigrants there are in the U.S. is to allow them to identify themselves without being deported. They should be given an opportunity and encouraged to become citizens as should highly skilled guest workers who have contributed to American technological innovation and America's economy. Federal and state governments would be able to collect taxes from these workers to fund education programs and Social Security. Employers would benefit from cheaper labor costs and consumers would then benefit from cheaper prices.

Potential Negative Consequences

U.S. citizens may have to compete for fewer jobs against cheaper workers, one the one hand, and more highly skilled workers on the other.

May encourage more immigrants to gain entry into the United States illegally.

Would allow those who have broken the law to go unpunished.

Point of View 3

The U.S. should enact comprehensive immigration reform that strengthens border enforcement, includes provisions for guest workers and sets up an admission system that encourages hard work, responsibility and competition. Such a system would give preference to education, English proficiency and work experience.

Potential Negative Consequences

Does not address the status of unauthorized immigrants already in the U.S.

May cost employers more to hire both unskilled and skilled workers.

Does not provide for people seeking political asylum.

Point of View 4

Immigration, both illegal and legal, should be reduced. There are too many foreign workers in the U.S. They lower wages and take jobs away from American citizens. Those who have entered the U.S. illegally should be deported because they have broken the law and highly skilled guest workers should not be allowed into the U.S. to take jobs American citizens can fill.

Potential Negative Consequences

May result in turning away people seeking political asylum.

Businesses, citizens, local, state and federal governments may not agree on how many and which immigrants are allowed to lawfully enter the U.S.

Deportation provisions may be unenforceable.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

1. Has the issue of immigration affected you or someone you know? If so, explain how. Think about how your experience has affected your values regarding immigration.

2. List at least one value that is evident in each of the four options.

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Option 4

3. In your opinion, what is the most serious potential consequence of each Point of View?

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Option 4

4. What values do the Points of View have in common?



THE EXCHANGE



A MARKETPLACE OF STUDENT IDEAS



“Should the United States reduce immigration?”

WE THE PEOPLE

Our country faces enormous challenges both foreign and domestic. We need citizens who believe that democracy demands more than voting in November. A sustainable democracy needs citizens who believe in taking part in our nation's political, social and economic discourse. The responsibility for maintaining a democracy that protects the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution is in the hands of the people.

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