

Introduction to Presidential Decision-Making

What are the complexities among the stakeholders who are affected by a presidential decision?

Overview

Students read a case study describing the Helsinki Accords and the decision that President Ford made to sign the accords. In small groups, they brainstorm a list of stakeholders affected by the accords, take on the role of one of these stakeholders, and write a decision statement from the perspective of that stakeholder.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/introduction-presidential-decision-making/>

Directions

1. Activate students' prior knowledge about decision-making.

As an entry ticket, have students quickly write about a significant decision they have made recently. Invite volunteers to share their responses with the class, and discuss. Guide the conversation by asking: *How did you make the decision? What things did you consider? Who did your decision affect? Who did you ask for help in making the decision?* Discuss the different ways students made their decisions and what factors were most important to them.

2. Introduce the topic of President Gerald R. Ford and the Helsinki Accords.

Ask students to quickly brainstorm, on paper, what they know about presidential decisions. Collect students' papers to review as a formative assessment. Then discuss presidential decision-making as a class. Ask: *In what ways do you think presidential decisions are similar to the decisions you make? In what ways are they different?* Explain that presidential decisions can have an impact on people around the world and for years to come. Tell students that, throughout this lesson, they will focus on an important decision that President Gerald Ford made in 1975. Play the provided video clip from the documentary *Gerald Ford: A Test of Character*. Discuss the clip as a whole class. Ask: *What were the Helsinki Accords? Why were they important?*

3. Have students read and discuss the case study.

Distribute a copy of the handout Case Study: The Helsinki Accords to each student and have students read the Introduction, Geography, Assessment, and Conflict sections independently. Have students annotate the case study by highlighting key points, marking any unfamiliar vocabulary, asking any questions of the material, and briefly summarizing each section. When students have finished reading, discuss the reading using the following prompts:

- *What was going on in the world politically at the time the Helsinki Accords were signed?*
- *What were some of the key ideas covered by the accords?*
- *How did the Soviet Union's goals in signing the accords differ from those of the U.S. and its allies?*

4. Have students write a decision statement from the perspective of one of the stakeholders in the decision.

Ask students to work in their small groups to brainstorm all of the people involved

in President Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Accords. Explain that these people are considered stakeholders in the decision. Ask groups to share their ideas with the class and write these ideas on the board. Assign a stakeholder from the case study to each group and ask them to read the section of the case study pertaining to their assigned stakeholder. Then, have each group draft a decision statement from the perspective of their assigned stakeholder. Groups' decision statements should include whether or not the stakeholder would want President Ford to sign the accords, why they feel this way, and how President Ford's signing the accords would affect them.

5. Invite groups to share their decision statements with the class.

Write "For signing the accords" and "Against signing the accords" on the board. Have each group read aloud their decision statement to the class. As they read, write their stakeholder under the appropriate heading. Discuss the similarities and differences in the stakeholders' opinions. Ask: *What were some of the most common concerns about the accords? What were some of the most common reasons in favor of signing the accords?* Collect students' annotated copies of the case study and their decision statements and keep them for use in Activities 3 and 4 of this lesson.

6. Have students reflect on the process they used to make their decisions.

In their small groups, ask students to discuss the process they used in making their decision. Then have each student write their thoughts about the decision-making process on a separate sheet of paper. Have them consider these questions: *What factors were most important to you in making your decision? What was difficult about making the decision? What were some factors that you considered but ultimately decided were not important to your decision? Explain.* When students have finished their reflections, preview the type of thinking they will do in Activity 2 by discussing what it might be like to have to consider all the various stakeholders' points of view when making the decision. Ask: *Do you feel that you could come to a decision that would satisfy all stakeholders? Why or why not?*

Alternative Assessment

Assess groups' written decision statements. Look for evidence of a general understanding of the historical importance and complexity of the Helsinki Accords, as well as an understanding of the perspective of their assigned stakeholder. Informally assess individual students based on their participation in the discussions and their written reflection statements.

Extending the Learning

Have students make a current-event connection to a significant decision in the news, using a modified version of the prompts in Step 1.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- Human Geography

Language Arts

- Reading
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- United States history
- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- identify the stakeholders in President Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Accords
- make a decision about signing the Helsinki Accords from the perspective of one of the stakeholders

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Reading
- Reflection
- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- 21st Century Themes
 - Global Awareness
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Understanding

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards

- **Theme 3:**

National Geography Standards

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

National Standards for History

- **U.S. History Era 9 (5-12) Standard 2:**

How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4:**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4:**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Comprehension and Collaboration, SL.11-12.1

- **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Comprehension and Collaboration, SL.9-10.1

- **Writing Standards 11-12:**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.11-12.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.9-10.1

- **Writing Standards 9-10:**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

The College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- **D2.His.4.9-12.:**

Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector, Speakers

Physical Space

- Classroom

Setup

Arrange the space so students can work in small groups.

Grouping

- Large-group instruction

Other Notes

In Activity 1, Step 5: Collect students' annotated copies of the case study and their decision statements and keep them for use in Activities 3 and 4 of this lesson.

Resources Provided: undefined

- Ford's Vision for Human Rights in Eastern Europe

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- [Case Study: The Helsinki Accords](#)

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
Allies	<i>noun</i>	alliance of countries that opposed the Axis during World War II. The Allies were led by the U.S., the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union.
Axis	<i>noun</i>	alliance of countries that opposed the Allies during World War II. The Axis was led by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
Cold War	<i>noun</i>	(1947-1991) conflict between the Soviet Union (and its allies) and the United States (and its allies). The two sides never confronted each other directly.
human rights	<i>noun</i>	basic freedoms belonging to every individual, including the rights to social and political expression, spirituality, and opportunity.
political boundary	<i>noun</i>	imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another.
political geography	<i>noun</i>	study of the spatial relationships that influence government or social policies.
Soviet Union	<i>noun</i>	(1922-1991) large northern Eurasian nation that had a communist government. Also called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the USSR.
stakeholder	<i>noun</i>	person or organization that has an interest or investment in a place, situation or company.
territory	<i>noun</i>	land an animal, human, or government protects from intruders.

For Further Exploration

Reference

- [National Geographic Education: Stakeholder Consequences Decision Making](#)

Video

- [National Geographic Channel: Gerald R. Ford: A Test of Character](#)

Websites

- [DeVos Learning Center at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum](#)
- [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum](#)
- [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum: Ford's Address in Helsinki](#)
- [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation](#)

Partner



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