

**MATT WALKER**

**CANTON ACADEMY**

**GOVERNMENT/ECONOMICS, 12<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Total Number of Students: approximately 20**

**Length of Project: 10-14 school days**

The philosophy of Canton Academy is based on Christian Principles and Academic Excellence. We believe that each student should have an opportunity to reach his/her maximum potential.

It is our responsibility to provide each student with varied learning experiences so that they may grow intellectually, socially, morally and physically.

The school shares with home, church and community the responsibility of providing each individual with the opportunity to make his/her best contribution to the democratic society in which they live.

Canton Academy seeks to enroll students in grades K3-12.

CA does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, or ethnic origin.

Minorities represent 3% of the student body.

Source- [www.cantonacademy.org](http://www.cantonacademy.org)

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to get students to become competent and aware of today's critical economic issues. We live in a dangerous society where the vast majority of the populace votes for politicians because they have a certain charisma or charm, and they don't have a clue what politicians stand for or their platforms. I teach government during the first semester of school, and I teach economics during the second semester. In both classes we go at a rapid pace to finish the textbook to get a good solid foundation of the material. In both government and economics we finish about 3-4 weeks before the end of the semester in order to do this project. What I do is take the number of students in the class and divide by two. That will give me the number of topics we are going to research. With twenty students, we will research ten topics. The topics are upper/college level. In order to ensure sophisticated research and competent conversation, I make a sheet of questions for each topic. Depending on the topic, I will lead them down the middle of the aisle and make the students research both sides of the debate. This will help them to make an informed decision on which side of the debate they believe. The goal is for the student to become an informed and productive citizen that is able to dissect important issues. They are to have an opinion because of the research of facts they have gathered and not because their parents or friends believe a certain way. I give the students about two topics a day. We will go over the questions (what I'm looking for, where to research on the web, etc.). The students go home and ask their parents their stance and answers to some of these questions. I tell them that it is fine if they use their parents as sources because some of the questions are opinion questions. Many times the parents tell me later that they love what we are doing because they have the best conversations at the dinner table; it brings them closer together and sometimes rejuvenates the parents and nixes their apathy toward becoming involved in political affairs. The students feel great as well because they learn, and they are inspired by their parents' reactions. After we have researched all the topics we draw numbers out of a cup randomly to pick topics. The students list the topics in order of their favorite to least favorite. Two students are allowed to debate on each topic. So if two people have already picked your favorite topic, then you just pick the next favorite on your list. After that is done we draw numbers again to see the order in which they want to debate. We are on a fifty-five minute class period schedule and meet everyday. We have two twenty-five minute slots each day when we start the formal debates. I act as the mediator and ask questions to each of the two students. If both students are on the same side of the issue, then I'll play devil's advocate and try to verbally slam them from the other side of the issue. I'll do that for fifteen minutes or so, then the class acts as the media and asks each of the two debaters questions that I might not have asked. The class will get a participation grade, and the two debaters will get a chapter test grade based on a 5-point criterion: 1) appearance, 2) articulation, 3) overcoming obstacles, 4) knowledge/research of the topic, and 5) presentation. Overall, the students love this project because it's challenging, and they love to get out of their comfort zone and argue. My personal goal is to help them argue well and competently.

## **Chronology, Instructional Process and Lessons**

### **Days 1-6**

#### **Lesson Description:**

The first day I hand out the first two topics (topic #'s 10 & 11). Again, these topics contain topics of a higher level of debating. Therefore, the handouts consist of questions to get them started on the right path for their research. We go over the questions, and I go over vaguely what I am looking for and how and where to find the data. They have until the next day at the beginning of class to complete the sheets. The next day after I check the previous day's topics for a homework grade I give them the next two topic sheets (topic #'s 12 & 13). We repeat the procedure mentioned above until all ten topics are covered. After topic #19 is finished and we go over it, we pick numbers to see which topics go to whom. Two students are assigned to debate each topic. After each student is assigned a topic we will then pick numbers again to decide when each group will go. We have seven periods everyday that last around fifty-five minutes in which I see the students everyday. I have two twenty-five minute slots during the class period each day.

#### **Grade Level: 12**

#### **National Economic Content Standards and Benchmarks:**

*Note: Due to the length and wide array of topics, I have detailed the use of the National and Mississippi Standards in the Evaluation. As you will see, literally every topic has multiple standards. I felt this would be more organized and less confusing.*

[See evaluation]

#### **Mississippi Economic Framework:**

[See evaluation]

#### **Student Objectives:**

Learn a basic understanding of the topics at hand. They should learn how to use primary and secondary sources to obtain as much data as possible in order to form an educated opinion on the debate topic.

#### ***Students should be able to...***

Learn why they believe a certain way based on the facts they have obtained. There is nothing wrong with being emotionally involved, but they shouldn't base their opinions on emotion alone. As Aristotle said, "they should learn how to think, not what to think." My wife and I have sort of adopted that quote as the mantra for all educators.

**Time Required:**

They have until the next school day at the beginning of class to complete the previous day's research. I will take up their sheets and check their answers based on the amount of effort they put into the questions. I don't necessarily count off if the questions are wrong, but if they put a great amount of effort into the assignment they get credit. I award a homework grade for the topic sheets. This procedure is done for each day we discuss the topics.

**Materials:**

- Debate topics handout sheets

**Procedure for Day1-Day6:**

- Take roll and check sheets from previous day for a homework grade. After all are checked we go over the questions to eliminate any confusion. Sometimes the students don't know which way to lean on certain topics and they ask my opinion. I'll give my opinion, but I make sure they know that they should believe in something not because others do but because they feel convicted one way or the other.
- Sample question: ex. Topic #18 Outsourcing. 3a. Is it fair for companies to outsource jobs to other countries? Some students will say no because they obviously hear the media talk about how Americans are losing their jobs to foreign countries because of cheaper labor. It's a valid point. However it's not a simple issue. Case in point the very next question on the handout. 3b. What is the sole purpose/goal for corporations? The answer to this question can be answered by any college student taking a principles class in business finance. The answer is to maximize profits for shareholders. So the people who "lost their jobs" have a 401-k, possibly, that is invested in these many different corporations whose goal is to maximize profits. That is exactly what the corporations are doing. Question #5 then ask the students how an individual can counter the obstacle of getting laid off. We talk about becoming more educated and more skilled. There is no excuse as every individual has a right to an education. What they make of it is up to them. How is it that the country of Luxembourg, whose size is comparable to the state of Connecticut, has citizens that are some of the most educated in the world. The average citizen in Luxembourg is multi-lingual and very skilled. They are obviously very marketable in the job market.

**Assessment:**

- Teacher Observation: The students seem to enjoy the topics a great deal because they learn new things, but they also get very involved. Out of ten topics there are several that seem to hit their "hot" buttons.
- Homework grade

## **Days 7-12**

### **Lesson Description:**

We start the formal debates on Days 7-12. Everyone is expected to dress up when it is their turn to debate. I usually start with the debate topic sheet questions and will go down each question asking one person at a time. I am the mediator for the debate. I just see where the debate takes us. If one person is for something, and the other is against it then I try to exploit one student against the other to try to find weaknesses in each one's point. How they handle the pressure of being put on the spot is one of the criteria of how they are graded. Some obviously handle it better than others. I might go on a rabbit trail that is not on the sheets to see how far they researched a particular question or sub-issue. Did they just answer the question just enough to get credit for the homework grade? Or did they research further in order to further pursue answers to the debate at hand to answer a conviction they felt. Once I begin it is pretty easy to find out the answers to these intangibles. I ask questions of both students typically for about fifteen minutes or so. After that the students that are not debating (I refer to them as the media) ask questions of the two students that I might not have asked. The purpose of this is two-fold. I give a participation grade to the "media" for paying attention and asking competent questions, and they may ask a great question that I might not have thought of asking. An example was one student was quizzing two debaters that were debating welfare if, instead of food stamps, should people have a type of debit card that only allowed them to purchase necessities. This student felt it could eliminate wasteful spending, save the taxpayers some money, and encourage the people on welfare to hurry up and get off welfare so they could have the freedom to buy what they wanted. The student even pointed out that it should be easy to apply since everything had bar codes anyway that the monitoring wouldn't be too hard to apply. I was impressed. This student was obviously paying attention and learning how to identify problems facing our society today, and this student had real-world solutions for the problems.

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