

**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.

### **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:**

Their objective is to prepare for the task at hand. They rehearse with their parents. I tell them to get their parents to try and stump them, learning so much about the topic that it is emblazoned in them. That way when they get in front of me and the other students they can perform without “stage fright.”

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

They should be able to answer questions about the topic competently. They should be passionate about each question and answer. They should be able to persuade the other students to their way of thinking. Even if they can't bring everyone over to their way of thinking then at least everyone can respect their viewpoint. Their credibility is up for grabs. If they are to be taken seriously they should learn how to prepare and communicate effectively. This is how leaders are found.

**Time Required:**

Six 55-minute classes.

**Materials:**

- The students are allowed to bring any research material to place on the podium.

**Procedure for Day7-Day12:**

- I ask one student a question. I may ask the other student their thoughts on the matter. I go through the entire sheet as I see fit. I then allow the other students to ask them questions. This is done for each debate topic.

**Assessment:**

- Teacher Observation: The students overcome their fear of speaking and debating in front of the class. For the most part they seem to step up to the plate. I had one student that was born when her parents were eighteen years of age. They decided not to have an abortion but to obviously have her. Their lives changed instantly. They got married, and they both had to work extremely hard to overcome the adversity they now faced. Both eventually went back to school and they made it. This student chose abortion as her topic (we do abortion during first semester when we are studying Government). She obviously felt very strong about the topic. She was normally a C student on the tests and normal material. However, she rose to the occasion in this debate and was one of just a few that made a perfect one hundred on the formal debate.
- 2 Chapter test grades

## **Evaluation**

This project was very hands on and a great deal of teacher-student conversation had to take place. However, it also required a great deal of research on the students' part. I basically treat these projects as their "senior project." That is one way to think of them. They are very demanding, but they are very rewarding due to the intelligence of the conversation in the classroom. The students ask many questions, and they get very involved. In order to simplify for purposes of this paper, I am going to take each standard (National & Mississippi) and list which topic applies and covers to that standard.

**NCEE Standard 3:** Allocation of Goods and Services: 1) Topic #14 Economic Systems.

**NCEE Standard 4:** Role of Incentives: 1) Topic #10 Our Current Tax Structure, 2) Topic #11 Welfare, 3) Topic #12 Social Security, 4) Topic #13 Foreign Aid, 5) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 6) Topic #15 Cigarette/Grocery Tax, 7) Topic #17 Presidential Powers, 8) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 9) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 5:** Gain From Trade: 1) Topic #13 Foreign Aid, 2) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 3) Topic #15 Cigarette/Grocery Tax, 4) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 6:** Specialization & Trade: 1) Topic #11 Welfare, 2) Topic #13 Foreign Aid, 3) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 4) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 5) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 10:** Role of Economic Institutions: 1) Topic #10 Our Current Tax Structure, 2) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 3) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 4) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 12:** Role of Interest Rates: 1) Topic #10 Our Current Tax Structure, 2) Topic #11 Welfare, 3) Topic #12 Social Security, 4) Topic #16 Monetary/Fiscal Policy, 5) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 6) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 13:** Role of Resources in Determining Income: 1) Topic #10 Our Current Tax Structure, 2) Topic #11 Welfare, 3) Topic #12 Social Security, 4) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 5) Topic #15 Cigarette/Grocery Tax, 6) Topic #16 Monetary/Fiscal Policy, 7) Topic #17 Presidential Powers, 8) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 9) Topic #19 Tort Reform.

**NCEE Standard 14:** Profit & the Entrepreneur: 1) Topic #10 Our Current Tax Structure, 2) Topic #11 Welfare, 3) Topic #12 Social Security, 4) Topic #14 Economic Systems, 5) Topic #15 Cigarette/Grocery Tax, 6) Topic #18 Outsourcing, 7) Topic #19 Tort Reform

**NCEE Standard 15:** Growth: Topics 10-12, 14-19.

**NCEE Standard 16:** Role of Government: Topics 10-19.

**NCEE Standard 17:** Using Cost/Benefit Analysis to Evaluate Government Programs: Topics 10-19.

**NCEE Standard 20:** Monetary and Fiscal Policy: Topics 10-13, 15, & 16.

## Mississippi Standards

1A: Define key terms and concepts (e.g., *scarcity, opportunity cost, trade-offs, productivity, inflation, deflation, monopoly, free enterprise, oligopoly, conglomerate, etc.*): Topics 10-19.

1E: Analyze the importance of imports and exports: Topics 13-15, 18, & 19.

1G: Analyze the impact of profit and competition in our market economy: Topics 10-19.

3A: Analyze the behavior of the consumer and the producer in a market economy and their impact on price: Topics 10-12, 14, 18, & 19.

3F: Discuss government controls on our economy (e.g., monetary policy, fiscal policy, federal reserve, etc.): Topics 10-16, 18, & 19.

4A: Distinguish between domestic and global economic systems and explain their interaction: Topics 13-14, 17, & 18.

4B: Apply economic concepts and reasoning when evaluating historic and contemporary social developments and issues: Topics 10-19.

4C: Evaluate the domestic and international impact of various economic agreements (e.g., NAFTA, EEC, GATT, etc.): Topic 18.

4D: Recognize economic trends and economic cycles: Topics 10-19.

5A: Compare cultural and religious differences that affect economic decisions: Topics 11-15, 17-19.

5C: Contrast and compare the United States' free-enterprise system and European socialism: Topics 11-12, & 14.

6D: Utilize primary and secondary sources: Topics 10-19.

As you can see the topics are broad and cover almost every standard listed. As I stated in the lesson part of the paper, we focus on two topics a day. The first day we go over the questions on the topic sheets I hand out. I won't answer the questions for them, but I will lead them down a road so that they can see where I want them to go. It is up to them to answer the questions for the next day's class period by way of internet or by asking other people. Most use their parents as sources. When they come into my class the next day I check their sheets for a homework grade. I look and can tell how much effort they put into the topics. Their homework daily grade reflects their effort. What I mean by that is if they worked their tails off and still might not have the "right" answers, or if they went down the wrong path as far as what we were talking about, I still give them a one hundred daily grade. After I grade everyone's sheets, we go over them more thoroughly and make sure everyone is on the same page. We answer anything left unanswered from the day before because I wanted to leave them "hanging" the day before so that they would research it for themselves. After that we usually have about fifteen minutes left in class. I hand out the next two topics and we repeat the steps until all ten topics are covered. This usually takes about five to seven days. The actual debates then begin. As I said in the abstract, we draw numbers to see which topic each one gets and when they are to debate. The two debaters might be on

the same side of an issue, and that is when I will play “devil’s advocate.” If they are on opposite sides of the issue, it will make it even that much more fun for all. It can get heated. I grade on five criteria (as stated in the abstract). The first is appearance. It doesn’t matter if it’s right or wrong, but the truth is that society judges you on your appearance. They are to act as if this is a job interview. Guys are to be in a shirt and tie. All buttons are to be buttoned. They are to have a clean belt and dress shoes. In other words they are not to look like a slob. A coat makes their grade even better. Girls are to be dressed professional and conservative. We are in a Christian school, so my rule is that the collar bone is the only thing we should see. If they choose to wear a dress or skirt then it must not be higher than an inch or two above the knee. I’m a male teacher, so the way I convey this to the girls from a business standpoint is communicating to them on how they want their future boss/interviewer to perceive them. Most agree that they want the job because of their competency, and they are the best candidate for the job. To be fair I wear a suit everyday when the debates start. It has been proven that the better you look, the better you feel and perform. If anything your credibility is still in tack. The second criterion is articulation. This obviously is how well they deliver their point. How smooth did they deliver? This comes from researching and becoming so comfortable with their topic that it’s instinctive. They are convicted by their beliefs, and it is their job to convince us to their way of thinking by having so many facts to back up their point of view. The third is overcoming obstacles. This is where I come into play. I’ll try to stump each student with a pretty tough question, or I’ll try to catch them in a contradiction. I want to see how well they handle the pressure. The fourth is knowledge and research of the topic. This is obvious. I can tell very quickly who did their homework or not. The ones that did are fighting for a chance to speak instead of trying to hide in the corner. The fifth and last criterion is presentation. I personally like hand gestures if they are done in a convincing way. However, fidgeting, tapping your feet, slouching, hands in the pockets, mumbling, etc. are obviously deductions in this category. Each criterion is worth up to twenty points. The debate grade is a test grade. I also count it twice in the grade book. I just feel that these debates are so important because they work on so many different skills (research, oral, auditory, critical thinking, handling pressure, etc). The other obvious factor is that the students learn so much in such a short time. It is a great deal of work, but it really is worth it. They are all seniors that are just becoming eligible to vote. They really feel prepared to be competent voters and let their voice be heard. I tell them that in actuality my lone vote may not make a difference, but my vote plus every person in my email account, every person I see and talk to, and all the people they come in contact with makes a HUGE difference. That wins or loses elections. It proves that one person can make a difference. And if you are conveying your beliefs and message in a clear, concise manner that is credible and resonates with people then, with God’s help, you can move mountains.

## **Bibliography:**

- Teacher made handouts.

Name:  
Date:

Debate Topic #10  
**Our Current Tax Structure**  
Coach Walker

1. What is a progressive tax? Where is this used?
2. What is a regressive tax? Where is this used?
3. What is a flat tax?
4. Is our current tax structure complicated? Fair? Why or why not? Explain.
5. Who pays the majority of taxes in the U.S.?
6. What's the definition of "Rich" or "Wealthy" when you hear "tax breaks for the rich and wealthy"?
7. What's the incentive for the working class in our country under the current tax structure?

Name:  
Date:

Debate Topic #11  
**Welfare**  
Coach Walker

1. What is welfare?
2. Who's eligible for welfare?
3. Compare John Smith's (Jamestown 1607) welfare policy with that of today's?
4. Do people abuse the welfare system?
5. Are there people that actually need welfare?
6. Is there an incentive for people to get off of welfare assistance?
7. How would you implement these policies/changes (if any) to our current welfare system?

8. Should people receiving welfare assistance be allowed to vote? Should they have to pass a urine/drug test/B.A.C. test to receive welfare? Should there be a time limit on welfare assistance?

9. Tell me about Tommy Thompson's (Governor Wisconsin) welfare reform in 1998.

10. Would you approve/disapprove of welfare recipients having a "Debit/Welfare Card" that only allows them to buy necessities?

Name:

Date:

Debate Topic #12  
**Social Security**  
Coach Walker

1. What is Social Security? When was it started?
  2. How much money is paid INTO Social Security each year?
  3. How much is paid OUT OF Social Security for benefits to people each year?
  4. What are experts saying about this program in the future? Why is it no longer profitable?
  5. Should people take care of their own retirement, or should they depend on the government for their retirement? Why?
  6. What are some possible solutions to fix this flawed system? Privatize or do away with?
- Ex. - \$2,000 a month times 4% equals \$80 a month. Twelve months would be \$960 a year privatized from FICA growing at 12% for 40 years = \$824,776.70.

Name:

Date:

Debate Topic #13

**Foreign Aid**

Coach Walker

1. How much does the U.S. spend each year in foreign aid?
  
2. How much of the foreign aid is paid by tax dollars?
  
3. How much is given by the private sector (donations, charities, etc.)?
  
4. Which country receives the largest percentage/or amount of our foreign aid?
  
5. How much money do we give to Africa for AIDS? Does the money go to the right people?
  
6. Is our foreign aid money/charity/help being spent wisely? Could we be more efficient?
  
7. Does our foreign aid get us in good graces with countries around the world? In other words, do the receivers of our aid appreciate our "gifts"?

Name:  
Date:

Debate Topic #14  
**Economic Systems**  
Coach Walker

1. List and explain the different economic systems?

Market-

Command-

Traditional-

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Socialism-

Democratic Socialism-

2. Which is the most successful?

3. Which one is the most ethical or fair?

4. Who is the “father” of a pure command, or socialistic, economy? Give me some dominant figures/people that support(ed) this type of system?

5. Who is the “father” of a pure market, or free enterprise, economy? Give me some dominant figures/people that support(ed) this type of system.

6. What are some of the drawbacks, or disadvantages of each?

Name:

Date:

Debate Topic #15  
**Cigarette Tax/Grocery Tax**  
Coach Walker

1. What is the current tax on a pack of cigarettes? How does this rate compare to the rest of the country and surrounding states?
2. What is the current tax(es) on groceries? How does this rate compare to the rest of the country and surrounding states?
3. Why do politicians want to bundle the two together? Why not look at each separately?
4. What might be some repercussions/benefits if the cigarette tax is raised?
5. What might be some repercussions/benefits if the grocery tax is lowered or done away with?
6. Could there be a compromise between the two sides? Also, if you're in favor of raising the cigarette tax and lowering the grocery tax, how far would you go with each tax?

Name:  
Date:

Debate Topic #16  
**Monetary/Fiscal Policy**  
Coach Walker

1. What is Monetary Policy (dealing with our federal government)?
2. What is Fiscal Policy (dealing with our federal government)?
3. If the Fed prints too much money, what might happen? What's their goal?
4. Discuss the Keynesian and monetarist (or classical) theories. Hint: Monetary deals with Federal Reserve and Fiscal deals with federal government (pres. and congress).

5. Why does the Fed raise and lower interest rates? What does government spending have to do with anything? In other words, how could that help or hurt the economy?

6. What role and capacity should our government play, and to what degree, with our “market economy”? Hint: this is a loaded question...this is why we have elections.



Name:

Date:

Debate Topic #18

**Outsourcing**

Coach Walker

1. What kind of industry did our economy start out as?
  
2. Explain the shifts in industries our country has gone through. Also, touch on GATT, NAFTA, and the WTO.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3a. Is it fair for companies to outsource jobs to other countries?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3b. What is the sole purpose/goal for corporations?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Is it fair to tell an entrepreneur what they can and can't do? Where does that stand as far as being free enterprise/market economy vs. command economy?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How might the average worker overcome being "exploited" and keep up with advancing technology and trends in the business world?

Name:  
Date:

Debate Topic #19  
**Tort Reform**  
Coach Walker

1. What is Tort Reform?
2. Do we have Tort Reform in Mississippi?
3. What do supporters of Tort Reform claim the benefits are?
4. What do critics of Tort Reform claim the disadvantages are?
5. What is the cap for available damages (money) one can receive in Mississippi? Is that enough?
6. What side of the political aisle (generally) do supporters and critics tend to be on? Explain.