



National Student/Parent Mock Election

Teacher's Guide to 2008 Presidential Election Issues - The Energy Crisis

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OVERVIEW: The Energy Crisis

World energy prices have increased dramatically as the United States retains its enormous thirst for oil, and developing countries like China and India consume ever larger amounts of the resource to fuel their rapidly growing economies. The consequences of this demand-driven energy crisis are both global and local. It will be a major issue in the presidential election as pocketbooks are strained and the country agitates for a national energy policy that benefits the environment, while developing new energy sources to replace our addiction to oil.

The foremost reason why oil prices in the United States have risen so dramatically is due to world demand for this exhaustible resource steadily outpacing world supply, resulting in higher fuel prices as the commodity becomes more scarce. The United States, with 4 percent of the world's population, consumes roughly a quarter of the oil produced globally each day, 22 million of 85 million barrels. China and India combined, which represent two of the world's fastest growing economies, tally 27 percent of the world's population, but together only consume 10 million barrels of oil each day, half as much as the United States. As China and India's economies continue their rapid expansions, they will demand larger amounts of oil to fuel their cars and industries and to heat their homes. It is unclear whether oil production can meet this long-term rise in demand for oil, which will keep energy prices high as we await alternative and clean, new energy sources.

Other contributing reasons for the high price of oil compared to years past are: a) a weak U.S. currency which requires more dollars to buy the same amount of imported oil as before; b) geopolitical uncertainties in the Middle East, Africa and other unstable regions that could substantially curtail the supply of oil in the future; c) a weak American stock market as money flows out of equities and into commodities like oil, searching for better investment opportunities.

The candidates in the presidential election will most likely focus on long-term solutions to our energy crisis as little can be done to bring the cost of oil down in the coming months. These policy prescriptions fall into three complementary categories: reducing our demand for oil, reducing our dependency on foreign oil, and investing in alternative and renewable energy resources.

Reducing our demand for oil could include mandating higher fuel efficiency for motor vehicles and a renewed commitment to our national rail system, which in turn would help to reduce our need of foreign oil. Greater investment in alternative and renewable energy sources such as hybrid and hydrogen technology for motor vehicles, and wind and solar energy for our homes, would help cut our carbon emissions and our dependency on oil. Until these new technologies and policies are established as viable alternatives to our carbon-based economy, we will continue to pay a premium for our dependency on oil.

OVERVIEW: Major Presidential Candidates' Positions on the Energy Crisis

Directions: This summary focuses on several significant issues within the larger campaign issue -- the energy crisis. For a more comprehensive description and rationale for their positions, use the web sites of the McCain and Obama campaigns cited in "Sources" below. After studying this issue through research and current events discussion, decide how you feel about each candidate's position for the three specific energy issues. Go to the **Comparing presidential candidates** chart to record your viewpoint on the candidates' energy policies. To help you decide, write the abbreviation next to each policy statement:

SA- strongly agree; **A-** agree; **SD-** strongly disagree; **D-** disagree; **N-** no opinion

National energy policy:

John McCain supports:

- _____ Significantly more domestic oil and natural gas production by increasing off-shore-drilling.(He had been against new off-shore-drilling.)
- _____ Promoting and expanding the use of natural gas.
- _____ The renewal of nuclear power plant construction.
- _____ Initiatives in alternative energy sources.

Barack Obama supports:

- _____ Limited increase of off-shore-drilling. (a recent change in his no new off-shore position).
- _____ Initiatives to develop clean coal uses in order to reduce our dependency on foreign oil sources.
- _____ Requiring oil companies to use existing drilling leases, rather than granting new leases for off-shore or Alaskan oilfields.
- _____ Restoring U.S. leadership on climate change.

Energy taxes and incentives:

John McCain supports:

- _____ Giving tax credits to businesses for investing in research and development, such as his Clean Car Challenge.
- _____ Eliminating federal gas tax during summer months.
- _____ Eliminating protectionist tariffs and special interest subsidies.
- _____ Not having any windfall profits tax on oil companies.

Barack Obama supports:

- _____ Windfall profits tax on top grossing oil companies.
- _____ Helping U.S. automakers with their health-care costs in exchange for more hybrid auto production.
- _____ Investment of \$150 billion over 10 years in production technology and development of biofuels and other renewable, clean energy sources.

Conservation Issues

John McCain supports:

- _____ Reducing dependency on fossil fuels by developing alternative energy sources.
- _____ Reducing auto emissions through market forces that will lead to cleaner technology (consumers will demand it).
- _____ Enforcing mileage requirements to compel all carmakers to produce fuel-efficient vehicles.
- _____ Programs to address climate change, such as reducing gas emissions.

Barack Obama supports:

- _____ Increasing the use of renewable energy sources.
- _____ Phasing out incandescent light bulbs by 2014.
- _____ Requiring all new vehicles to be able to run on biofuels.
- _____ Requiring standards that will cut auto emissions by 80 percent by mid-century.

Recent rapid increase in fuel costs (some as also cited under Energy Policy)

John McCain supports:

- _____ Eliminating federal gas tax during the summer months.
- _____ Increasing off-shore drilling for oil as quickly as possible.

Barack Obama supports:

- _____ Selling 10 percent of the nation's strategic oil reserves as a near-term way of reducing gas prices.
- _____ Reducing the burden of rising gas prices on working families by increasing regulation of oil markets and their price manipulation.

Other energy issue(s) important to you: Use the candidate's web sites cited below to learn their position.

Issue: _____

Summarize the candidates' positions on this energy issue on another sheet.

Sources:

Obama-McCain comparisons at:

<http://www.obama-mccain.info/compare-obama-mccain-economy.php>

McCain campaign at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/issues>

Obama campaign at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues>

Google Election Tools for Teachers at:

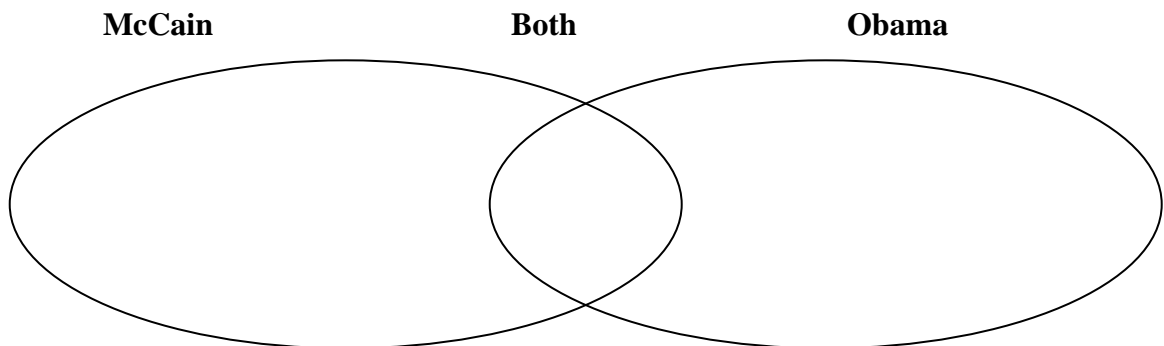
http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html

ACTIVITY: Compare and Contrast the Major Candidates' Positions on the Energy Crisis

1. Research the candidates' positions and proposals for solving our country's energy problems. Use their campaign Web sites, campaign literature, and search news reports and speeches that deal with this issue. Online searches can start with Google Election Tools for Teachers at:

www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html

2. Using key words or phrases, record the major energy proposals of McCain and Obama on this Venn diagram.



Questions based on your research and the graphic organizer above:

1. Do McCain and Obama have any similar views or solutions for our country's energy issues or problems? If so, what are they and why did they agree on these specific issues?
2. On what energy issues do McCain and Obama differ the most? Describe their differences.
3. What might this comparison tell us about the differences between the Republican and Democratic parties?
4. Which candidate is more likely to believe in the following policy about the energy crisis?
Write **M** for John McCain and **O** for Barack Obama.

___ Increase domestic oil and natural gas production by a major increase of off-shore-drilling.

___ Restore the United States' leadership on climate change and conservation.

___ Provide tax credits to businesses for investing in research and development.

___ Sell 10% nation's strategic oil reserve to help reduce gas prices.

___ No federal gas tax during summer. ___ Cut auto emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

___ Windfall profit taxes on largest oil producers. ___ Advocates nuclear power.

ACTIVITY: My Opinion – Do I Agree with the Candidates’ Positions on the Energy Crisis?

Directions: Use your **Presidential candidates’ positions sheet** to determine which candidate you agree with most about dealing with our energy crisis. The Google Election Tools, teaching about issues and candidates link is useful :

http://www.google.com/educations_tools.html

Write the key words or phrase representing your feelings about the candidate’s position for each of the issues: high energy costs; demand for oil vs. conservation; and future plans for alternative energy sources.

John McCain, Republican

Agree with his position on: **Disagree with his position on:** **Uncertain or no opinion:**

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Barack Obama, Democrat

Agree with his position on: **Disagree with his position on:** **Uncertain or no opinion:**

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Optional: Third Party Candidate: _____

You will need to research the candidate’s positions on the issue using the web site links from:
<http://www.politics1.com/p2008.htm>

... Agree with his position on:

Disagree with his position on:

Uncertain or no opinion:

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Your decision: Based on your research and the completed chart above, which presidential candidate do you agree with most? Explain why their plans for dealing with the energy crisis are best for the country.

For this issue I believe that _____ has the best plans to deal with our country's energy issues and problems because:

Recommended Activities from Previous NSPME Teachers Guides

Consider using the activities for the Energy/Environment Issue found in 2006 NSPME Teachers Guide. You can update the activities with current events articles. The guide is available online in .pdf format at:

http://www.nationalmockelection.org/docs/curriculum_issues_forum_2006.pdf

- Students write an essay to their own generation -- “How should we respond to the energy/environment crisis we will inherit?” Is there a right way of dealing with this crisis?
- Collect reports from socially responsible corporations – what do they propose to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and protect our environment? Are their reports ever written from an ethical viewpoint – what is right to do rather than just profit motive?
- Invite elected officials and local business people to talk to your students about how they are affected by the energy crisis and what might be viable solutions, without harming the environment?

ACTIVITY: Mock Presidential Debate Based on Readings – Oil Exploration Versus Conservation

Many political opinion articles and editorials have been and will be written about the 2008 election, its issues and candidates. How does one sort out and make sense of all the various opinions given by the political analysts and partisan supporters? The concerns of overcoming high oil prices by exploration and conservation have become entwined because of proposals to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) in northeast Alaska and off-shore oil fields to new drilling. What are John McCain and Barack Obama advocating on these energy-related issue? How might they debate each other on this issue?

Organize a mock presidential debate about what should be the national policies for energy and conservation, which sometimes have conflicting goals.

Debate question: *With rising fuel prices, can our country afford to continue the same conservation policy of no new oil drilling in protected areas, such as ANWR or the Gulf and Pacific coasts?*

Procedure -- Students will prepare for and stage a mock debate between the presidential candidates, with the audience as their supporters. Students can take turns role-playing John McCain and Barack Obama (third-party candidates optional). Other students have the role of loyal supporters of a candidate who will put thoughtful questions to the other candidate(s).

Objectives: Students will learn:

- How to select a position and support it based on critical reading of political articles;
- The concept of political debate (dialectic discourse);
- To communicate a political viewpoint either as a candidate or as supporter.

Steps:

1.) Collect articles, editorials and news reports from newspapers, news magazines, Internet news and political sites. The following are examples of articles dealing with the ethical question: Can there be a balance between our energy needs and conservation of cultural and natural resources?

○

“Energy Boom in West Threatens Indian Artifacts” at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/us/02artifacts.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print

“Energy Follies at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/opinion/04mon1.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print>

Wind energy -- “In the Hills of Nebraska, Change Is on the Horizon” at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/us/04land.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print>

2. Categorize the articles according to:

- Whether they support the positions of the McCain or Obama campaigns:, or are balanced reports;
- The issue discussed: oil prices and energy policy, or conservation/limiting new drilling in protected areas. Write the main ideas found in the readings about the candidate(s) and the issues in a learning journal or class bulletin board.

3. Visit the campaign web sites of McCain and Obama to find out their official stand on energy and conservation policies. What does each candidate actually advocate as his energy and/or conservation policies if elected president?

4. Teach students about the practices, purposes, and procedures of political debates. A suggested debate resource is DebateWatch at:

<http://www.debates.org/pages/dwoverview.html>

Students can view presidential debates and analyze what makes a debater successful in advocating a viewpoint.

5. Students decide the candidate they wish to support and role-play.

6. Students learn the rules of a political debate. Rules can be developed by the class.

7. Debate with students taking turns as presidential candidates. Two to four students at a time take turns being the moderator or questioners.

8. Students must use information they found in their readings and other sources because they are role-playing, not giving their individual opinions.

9. After the debate, reflect on how it went; and which candidate's viewpoints appear to be supported most by news reports and opinion columns.

10. Students share their views on the ethics forum and blog at:

<http://college-ethics.blogspot.com/2008/06/winter-energy-crisis-how-you-can-help.html>

(Ethics in democracy theme)



ACTIVITY: Paideia Seminar – “How Free Trade Can Help Solve the Energy Crisis”

“The unprecedented escalation in oil and food prices is a clear and present danger to our economy and national security. The root cause of this crisis is our dependence on a single commodity, oil, for transportation -- we burn 145 billion gallons of gasoline a year. The only permanent solution is diversity in our fuel supply to ensure competition and choice in the marketplace.” From a Wall Street Journal 7/26/08 op-ed article “How Free Trade Can Help Solve the Energy Crisis” written by former national security adviser Robert McFarlane and professor George Philippidis.

See: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121702724001286291.html?mod=opinion_main_commentaries

Also see the comments at <http://forums.wsj.com/viewtopic.php?t=3455>

Purpose of a Paideia seminar -- Students develop critical reading and thinking skills to gain a deeper understanding of complex reading and its concepts, ideas and values. Note: Paideia seminars are sometimes called Socratic teaching, after the first “social studies” teacher in ancient Greece who taught his students by only asking questions.

Selection of text:

This sample lesson uses the op-ed article quoted above. However, you are encouraged to select a recent text (editorial, op-ed article, news report) about an energy issue that is appropriate for your curricular objectives and your students’ academic abilities, interests and needs. Paideia seminars are used in conjunction with direct instruction of content (brief, didactic teaching) and intellectual coaching for skill development.

The seminar focuses on the ideas and concepts that are essential to achieve deep understanding of the content. In this lesson’s reading, they are: free trade, the energy crisis, biofuels as alternative energy sources, and national security. The key to successful use of the Paideia seminar is asking **open-ended questions** that provoke numerous thought-out responses by students.

Characteristics of Socratic teaching and a Paideia seminar:

- The teacher as facilitator, moderator and good listener;
- Teaching by asking questions;
- Clarifying points/opinions given by students.

Lesson Plan Model:

Pre-seminar:

1. Teach a brief lesson about the concepts found in the article.

2. Students read the article silently, and highlight the main ideas and points of view.
3. Using post-it notes or note cards, students write and post possible questions for discussion.
4. Students are seated in a circle or horseshoe to see each other when they talk.
5. Review Paideia seminar rules. (See the sources below for the rules.)

Seminar:

1. Students sit according to their viewpoint: pro or con, or by candidate.
2. The teacher poses opening question(s), such as: “What is the main idea that McFarlane and Philippidis express in this article?” Take turns giving each student the opportunity to respond or agree/disagree with previous responses.
3. Pose core question(s) with the purpose of having students closely analyze the details of the text. For example, “Why do the authors support free trade with Latin America?” along with follow-up questions by the teacher and students.
4. Closing question(s) are used to develop student opinions and apply it to their own situation(s). For example, “Could this proposal could solve the energy crisis? How might it change our lives?” What are the ethical implications of these recommendations?

Post-seminar:

1. Reflect on how the seminar went? Do you have a better understanding of the problem, issue and possible solutions? How did you do with your own participation in the discussion?
2. Optional activities: a) Students write a brief essay either supporting or rebutting the article. b) Students blog their opinion of the Wall Street Journal article at the forum link cited above.

Sources for learning more about Paideia seminar teaching strategy:

- Paideia active learning Web site at:
- <http://www.paideia.org/content.php/system/index.htm>
- Adler, Mortimer J. The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto, Touchstone, 1998.
- National Paideia Center (corporate authorship). The Power of Paideia Schools: Defining Lives Through Learning, ASCD, 1998.
- Roberts, Terry and Laura Billings. The Paideia Classroom: Teaching for Understanding. Eye on Education, 1998.

ACTIVITY: Problem-Based Learning – How Can We Solve the Energy Crisis Without Sacrificing the Environment?

In recent months energy has surpassed the Iraq war as the primary issue for the presidential campaign. The Wall Street Journal reported July 25, 2008 “a WSJ/NBC news poll finds that energy -- including gasoline and utility costs -- ranks as the economic issue that voters say affects them most personally.”

With worldwide demand for oil increasing, especially in China and India, petroleum has become an expensive commodity. A result has been fuel prices rapidly increasing in the United States, putting strain on most family budgets. A solution would be to increase U.S. supplies to meet the demand for oil products.

However, that would mean increasing oil production, often by opening new oil fields such as in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in northeastern Alaska, and off-shore along the Gulf Coast and Pacific Coast. Until recently, both Obama and McCain were against new drilling in those protected areas. However, public opinion seems to be changing toward the possibility of new drilling in order to help reduce fuel costs. Family economics might overcome support for conservation of natural environments.

Now McCain is advocating new offshore drilling, while Obama states that he might consider limited offshore drilling as part of a comprehensive energy plan. Congressional Democrats instead advocate drilling in areas already leased for the purpose but not yet explored. Idealism meets economic reality. So what is best for our nation’s energy and conservation policies? Is the energy crisis forcing us to consider *ethical questions* about business practices, our relationship with nature and our responsibilities to future generations?

The problem is how can we solve the energy crisis without sacrificing the environment? That is an open-ended question that could invite many different solutions. This is an ideal problem for students to research, analyze, make decisions about and propose their solution(s). Problem-based learning helps students learn about real problems, like the energy crisis, through investigation of the problem, its causes and characteristics, and determine possible solutions; then analyze those solutions to select the best. Students must develop a rationale for their decision and communicate it to the class, or sometimes even to the general public through presentations, letters to the editor, or dialogue with elected officials.

Students’ final product: To make policy recommendation(s) on how the United States should deal with high energy costs and maintain its conservation of the environment. Is it possible to have a balance between the two? If so, how? How is this an ethical question of doing what is right for future generations to “secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity” (from the preamble of the U.S. Constitution)?

Presentations can include: oral report with posters and charts, campaign speech (role-play as a candidate), PowerPoint, or online dialogue (blog or chat room with teacher approval of site).

For an overview and recommended sources about problem-based learning as a compelling teaching strategy, see the 2008 NS/PME Guide to the Economy, under the activity “Finding Possible Solutions for the Problems of the U.S. Economy.”

Basic Steps of Problem-based Learning (PBL):

- Meet the problem as an open-ended, real-life situation: news stories, personal experiences, role-playing.
- Define the problem – students define the problem as a research question -- what needs to be done to solve it.
- Research – gathering information relevant to the problem and re-defining the question if necessary.
- Brainstorming of possible solutions based on research and “hunches.”
- More research – use all available sources to find information supporting or disputing the possible solutions.
- Selection of best solution(s).
- Communicate your problem and recommended solution(s) – class presentations; the best could be shared on election blogs appropriate for students. Students could role- play as McCain or Obama giving a speech to Americans at their party’s convention, a political rally, or a town meeting.
- Reflect on your learning experience – What did I learn from doing the PBL activity? What did I do best? How could I improve my learning and work habits? Could I use the PBL model to make decisions in the future?

Suggestions to facilitate this learning experience:

- Pose the research and discussion questions in ethical terms of what is morally and/or legally right – for our children’s future, the environment; business decisions by energy corporations. (*Ethics in Democracy* theme)
- Teacher as guide and facilitator, not dispenser of knowledge. Students are investigators and policy-makers, using higher-order thinking.
- Students research newspapers, TV newscasts and online for any campaign speeches or position statements that McCain and Obama make on the issue of fuel prices vs. conservation. Students record candidates’ statements about new drilling in protected areas and about conservation. Check their campaign Web sites for their policy statements. Has there been a change in their positions about conservation and new drilling for oil? Has public opinion influenced the candidates’ positions?
- See NSPME Teachers Guide for 2006 Election: Suggested Activities – Energy/ Environment. It has a list of new and alternative energy sources that could be considered by students when brainstorming for possible solutions.
- Checking on student progress and assessment should be done throughout the activity, not just the final presentation.

