

Research a Political Issue or Proposed Action in Sustainability

How do you assess the pros and cons of a political issue or proposed action, especially one about the environment? Who's perspective do you take? By considering the impacts to all aspects of the “triple bottom line” of sustainability, students can learn to assess the pros and cons of the proposed action or issue in a way that includes society, economy, and the environment at the same time.

GRADE: High School

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Head, Heart

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- Computers with internet access

STEPS*:

- Select a sustainability-related issue to research. You can pick one for the class, provide a selection they can choose from, or help them to pick their own (see tips below to help students find a topic). Students can work individually or in groups.
- Outline the requirements for the research project – what should students know by the time they are done? The list could include:
 - What their issue or action is
 - What are the impacts (either positive or negative) to each of the following: the economy, the environment, and society i.e. people's health and well-being, community, culture
 - Who is proposing or supporting it and why - which of the triple bottom line aspects are the focused on?
 - Who is opposing it and why - which of the triple bottom line aspects are the focused on?
- If you want, ask students to take a stand on the issue. After weighing all of the pros and cons, ask them to make an argument for what they think should be done, or which side they support, and why
- Students can present their research in whatever format you are comfortable with - a written report, a power-point presentation, a video, etc.

*For more detail on the grade-level focus for natural and social concepts and sense of place, please refer to the Guidelines

TIPS AND TRICKS

- For students looking for their own topics, it may help to check their proficiency in selecting search terms in online search platforms like Google. Try using a combination of topic (i.e. water, energy, land) and location or scale (Boulder, Colorado, Jefferson County, etc.)
- You may have to dig a bit but most government agencies keep an online list or register of proposed political actions. For example, a Google search for “Boulder County proposed action” leads to a searchable database of development applications under review (part of the planning and land use department). The Federal Register allows you to search proposed legislation by agency or topic at the state and national level <https://www.federalregister.gov>.
- As with all internet-based research, take time to talk to students about the reliability of their sources, including looking for hints of bias in reporting (hyperbole, unrealistic or un-cited statistics, etc..)
- Try requiring that students use different types of sources for their research. Interviews with experts on both sides of a topic can be a great way for students to build their skills in communication, professionalism, and qualitative data gathering and analysis.



Relevant Standards

SS09-GR.HS-S.2-GLE.3, SS09-GR.HS-S.3-GLE.1, RWC09-GR.HS-S.4-GLE1