

September 11th Education Program: A National Interdisciplinary Curriculum

The September 11th Education Program was developed by the September 11th Education Trust. It is an organization comprised of 9/11 victims' family members, survivors, rescue workers, and educators in partnership with the Taft Institute for Government. They are united in the cause of teaching about 9/11 and its aftermath. Its comprehensive lesson plans are unique in that they are personalized and enriched through first-hand accounts, filmed oral histories, and authentic, primary archival materials to permanently record this shared historic event in a way that is inspiring and relevant to the nation's youth. The Trust believes that building on the story of 9/11, the courage, compassion, and unprecedented civic responses, translates beyond the classroom and provides lessons that the nation's youth can apply to lead more meaningful, productive lives.

The curriculum is dedicated to "all the innocent people who died in the September 11th terrorist attacks," but especially the eight children who were killed. They are Christine Lee Hanson, 2 years old, on UA Flight 175, Dana Falkenberg, 3 years old, on AA Flight 77, David Reed Gamboa Brandhorst, 3 years old, on US Flight 175, Juliana Valentine McCourt, 4 years old, on UA Flight 175, Zoe Falkenberg, 8 years old, on AA Flight 77, Bernard Curtis Brown II, 11 years old, on AA Flight 77, Asia S. Cottom, 11 years old, on AA Flight 77, and Rodney Dickens, 11 years old, on AA Flight 77.

The September 11th Education Program: A National Interdisciplinary Curriculum is an attempt to bring order and meaning and to provide context for that day. It was piloted in the fall of 2008 at River Dell High School in Bergen County, New Jersey. At the time, its developers did not know how students would react. Even though September 11, 2001, is viewed as a defining day in American history, educators across the country have grappled with how to preserve and harness its vital lessons and many have never broached the subject with their students.

The seven lessons in the curriculum include recounted memories from elected officials such as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and current and former members of the federal and state legislatures. A DVD provides real time images and oral histories describing the events of September 11th. A website www.learnabout9-11.org is regularly updated with additional relevant information. Every lesson includes vivid photographs, candid oral histories, and video footage that bring the stories of the participants to life. The stories are real, heart wrenching, personal, and true.

The first lesson, "Visualizing 9/11," introduces the events through photographs and oral histories. In the second, entitled "The Historian's Craft," students create a timeline from the oral histories that provides context to the unfolding events of the day. Students also explore broader timelines of different times and places to assist with the understanding of larger historical perspectives.

The third lesson focuses on "The Post-9/11 Recovery Process." Students examine the complexities of recovering the remains of victims as well as analyze U.S. preparedness. In lesson four, "Designing a 9/11 Memorial," students design their own memorial of remembrance for the victims. They also review the controversy over the memorial at the World Trade Center site and gain an appreciation for the balancing act that elected officials encounter when dealing with diverse constituencies. Lesson five, "Honoring Heroes," helps students develop an understanding of heroism and how it applies to the roles individuals played on 9/11. Students thoughtfully consider the actions of ordinary people in extraordinary situations.

Lesson six, "Advocacy: Civic Action and the Role of Government," introduces students to the controversies surrounding the investigation of governmental policies before, during and after the 9/11 attacks. Students also examine the creation of the 9/11 Commission. Finally, in lesson seven, "U.S. National Security and 9/11," students review U.S. foreign policy positions regarding national security and weigh their effectiveness in protecting the U.S. from future terrorist acts.

U.S. National Security and 9/11

Overview: Students become familiar with four possible U.S. foreign policy positions regarding national security. They analyze the reasoning supporting each position and weigh its potential effectiveness in protecting the U.S. from terrorism and other external threats. Incorporating this analysis, students will write a position paper on the most effective foreign policy regarding national security, and create a detailed plan to influence others, particularly government officials, to have their policy implemented.

Goals: Students will understand that the United State can implement a variety of foreign policy positions to increase its national security depending on the circumstances. They will be familiar with four foreign policy options regarding national security available to the United States.

Objectives: Students reflect on their beliefs regarding U.S. foreign policy and national security; describe and analyze soft and hard power, unilateralism, multilateralism, and isolationism; review oral histories, national policy statements, and political analysts' views of proposed policies to address terrorism after 9/11; rank the potential effectiveness of proposed national security positions, supporting their analysis with details; and write a persuasive statement to advance their position.

Background: National security is a complex and controversial topic that arouses heated arguments on our most basic needs and cultural values. Is it possible to work with peoples of other countries and cultures and use negotiation to achieve our national security goals, or should we rely mainly on our superior military force and economic hegemony to advance our interests and policies? It's also possible to argue that the U.S. has no right to intervene in other countries affairs and may only become involved after its own territory has been attacked. This is a position held periodically through America's history. Students analyze the reasoning behind their current beliefs on U.S. national-security foreign policy. They review the positions and reasoning of 9/11 victims' family members, President George W. Bush on the "Bush Doctrine," and two American policy analysts. Incorporating their analysis of this information, students will develop an effective U.S. foreign policy regarding national security and write a persuasive essay supporting their position and outlining a plan to have their proposed policy implemented.

Essential Questions: How should the U.S. manage its relationships with other nations to keep the country and its people safe? What are unilateralism, multilateralism, and isolationism? How can they be applied to America's foreign policy? What is hard power and soft power? How can they be applied to America's foreign policy options?

Activity 1: Students reflect on their beliefs about options for U.S. national security foreign policy and decide whether they strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

A. Unilateralism: The United States has the right and obligation to take action independently to advance its own interests and further its national security goals, even if it affects other countries.

B. Multilateralism: The United States can better advance its national security interests when it works with allies and international organizations, like the United Nations, to create international policies that apply to all nations, rather than acting independently.

C. Isolationism: The United States should stay out of the affairs of other countries, except when its territory has been directly attacked.

D. Hard Power: The United States should rely more on its military and economic strength to achieve its foreign policy goals, rather than diplomacy.

E. Soft Power: The United States should rely more on its moral leadership and power of persuasion to achieve its foreign policy goals, rather than military and economic might.

Activity 2: The class reads and discusses "Four Foreign Policy Positions" and teams read different "Foreign Policy Readings": Joseph Nye, "Soft Power and Leadership" (<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4290.html>); "Letter to President Bush from Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez" (<http://commondreams.org/views01/0919-08.htm>); "Bush Doctrine," June 1, 2002 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/01/international/02PTEx-WEB.html>); and William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Reject the Global Buddy System" (http://www.newamericancentury.org/def_natl_sec_044.htm). Teams report to the class and students discuss which of the four author's positions makes the most sense to them, how the authors view human nature, how this view affects their foreign policy position, and which author has the most realistic foreign policy for the United States.