

# THE GREAT ENERGY DEBATE

## Overview:

Energy resources keep the lights on and the wheels turning around the world. The United States, which comprises only 5 percent of the world's population, consumes about 30 percent of the total energy. Traditionally, the United States has imported much of its energy resources from other countries. Oil from the Middle East is the largest energy import. This dependency places us in a highly vulnerable position, both economically and politically. Some of the ways suggested to lessen this dependency are to use more of our public lands for energy production and to invest in renewable energy. Both of these strategies are controversial because of the environmental, economic, political, and cultural implications associated with them.

This lesson explores the controversial issues surrounding the energy debate in the United States. Students will research recent initiatives being taken in this area and analyze their implications. They will then assume the roles of pivotal stakeholders in this debate and testify to a mock congressional committee responsible for making decisions about public lands and energy resources. i.e. Mohave desert, arctic tundra.

Students will be divided into several groups. In terms of the groups researching energy resources, provide the following information about their energy source to the class: a definition, three examples of how the source is used, and three advantages and three disadvantages of using the source, and locations that have already implemented this type of energy resource. Much of this information can be found on the Web sites listed under Related Links below. Once they have completed this research, have the groups make a summary presentation of their findings to the rest of the class. Possible choices: fossil fuels, geothermal, hydroelectric, biomass, solar, wind, fuel cells, nuclear.

Other stakeholders:

- Economists
- Energy experts
- Members of Youth for Environmental Action
- Native Americans
- President of the American Petroleum Institute
- President of the Sierra Club
- Senator
- Tourism officials
- U.S. Secretary of the Interior
- Unemployed people
- Wildlife experts

Groups can start online research with the Web sites in the Related Links section, below. Remember, in a highly controversial issue like this, certain information might be presented with a bias. For example, one particular group may present possible environmental damage as minimal, while another will present it as significant. Use your best judgment about what is factual and may even want to try to find additional sources to validate information.

## Closing:

5 students will serve as the US Senate Committee for Energy and natural Resources. They must research their role and what the past actions of the committee were. They will conduct the committee hearing. Each group of stakeholders will have 5 minutes to state its case. Then the

committee will be permitted to ask additional questions. After each group testifies, each group will have 2 minutes to state counterarguments. At the end, the committee will determine which group was most persuasive and why.

### Extending the Lesson:

- Review the recent energy problems occurring in the United States and ask students to suggest ways to solve these problems. Have students take action by writing a letter or sending an e-mail to their congressional representatives. Use sites such as [Congress.org](http://Congress.org) to find out how to contact individual members.

### Related Links:

[Alternative Energy Institute, Inc – www.altenergy.org/](http://www.altenergy.org/)

[American Petroleum Institute – http://api-ec.api.org/newsplashpage/index.cfm](http://api-ec.api.org/newsplashpage/index.cfm)

[British Petroleum – http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html)

[CIA World Factbook - http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html)

[National Renewable Energy Laboratory – http://www.nrel.gov/](http://www.nrel.gov/)

[Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries \(OPEC\) – www.opec.org/](http://www.opec.org/)

[U.S. Department of Energy – www.energy.gov/](http://www.energy.gov/)

[U.S. Department of the Interior – www.doi.gov/](http://www.doi.gov/)

[U.S. Energy and World Energy Statistics –](http://energy.cr.usgs.gov/energy.stats_etry/Stat1.html)

[http://energy.cr.usgs.gov/energy.stats\\_etry/Stat1.html](http://energy.cr.usgs.gov/energy.stats_etry/Stat1.html)

[U.S. Geological Survey – http://www.usgs.gov/](http://www.usgs.gov/)

[U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources –](http://www.senate.gov/~energy/)

<http://www.senate.gov/~energy/>

### Grading Rubric

Item	Points
Group's research	/10
Group presentation of information – clear, accurate Or Committee decision – logical, supported	/10
Group presentation of information – persuasive & logical Or Committee ability to run a smooth debate	/10
Individual Effort	/10
Total	/40

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