

Areas of Special Consideration

Controversial Topics in the Teaching of Geography

American Exceptionalism

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Advice: For this level it is best to let state school board handle it, don't turn your classroom into your personal sounding board, if you have concerns consider testifying or writing your state school board member

American Exceptionalism Key Points

- Political influence on curriculum
- Politicians vs. academics
 - Purpose of social studies



Case Study - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2016/12/01/ben-sasses-words-of-wisdom/>

Climate Change/Global Warming

Situation: A student in your class has a certain set of beliefs regarding the topic and is able to repeat talking points that support their viewpoint without being able to expand on them, and is unwilling to consider alternative viewpoints.

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Advice: Clarify to the student the scientific process and the meaning of Scientific Theory vs. Scientific Law, suggest resources for the student to examine that further explain the science behind the theory.

Climate Change/Global Warming Key Points

- Curriculum development involves a number of factors
 - State Standards
 - District curriculum
- Use of Scientific Theory and the Use of data and process to explain geographic concepts



Case Study -

<https://hechingerreport.org/teaching-global-warming-in-a-charged-political-climate/>

Critical Race Theory/Race

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Advice: The goal of curriculum projects like the 1619 Project by the New York Times is not to get students to hate America, but to get students to consider the role race has played and still affects the country. A good historical analysis has students consider multiple viewpoints. The point of addressing inequality is to begin the process of remedying. If you receive communications it is best to defer to your district's curriculum specialists

Critical Race Theory/Race Key Points

- One of the key components of civic education is developing students as Critical Thinkers
- Students may ask about it or bring it up, use it as a “teachable moment” to have them consider the reasoning for arguments
- Classroom needs to be a place where students feel comfortable sharing opinions and that is free of intolerance

Case Study -

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/01/us/critical-race-theory-explainer-trnd/index.html>



Cultural Relativism

Situation: While watching a movie on the cultural practices of a group of people in another country a student is offended and calls the cultural practice “weird”

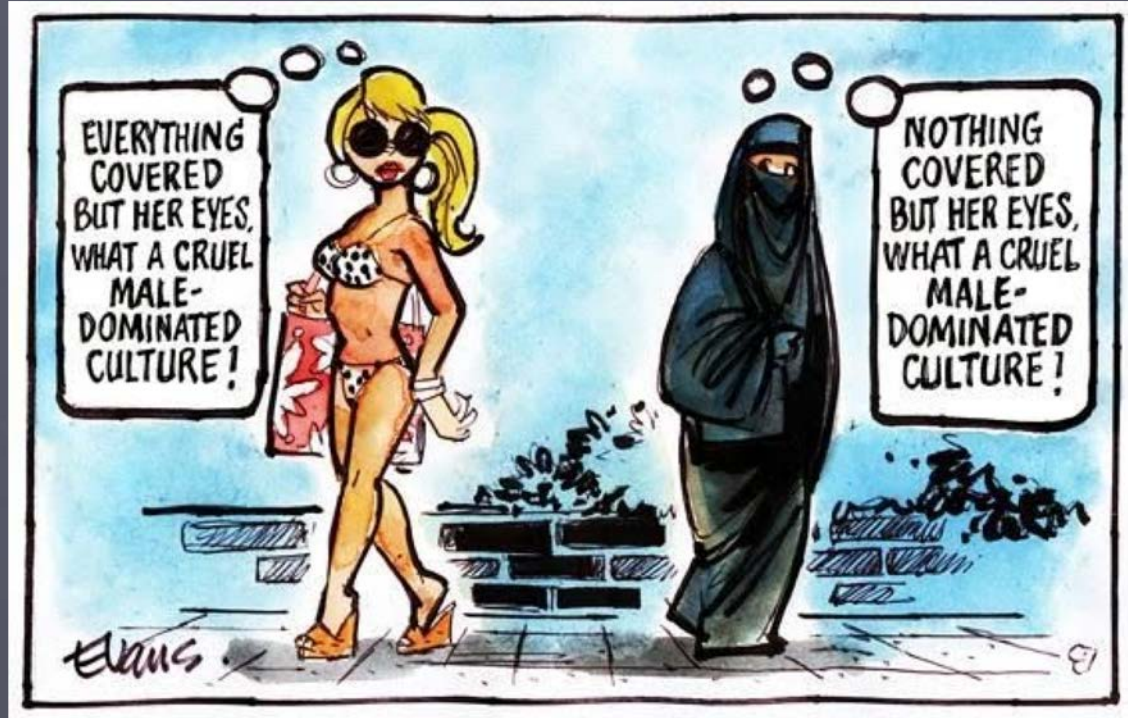
Cultural Relativism

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Advice: Point out that when studying culture it is important to avoid egocentrism and that cultures needs to be evaluated for what they are, not judge them against the values of another culture. Cultural relativism is a topic that could/should be discussed at the beginning of a cultural geography course

Cultural Relativism Key Points

- Avoid Ethnocentrism or promoting a particular agenda
- Morality and ideas of “right” and “wrong” can vary



Development

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Advice: Incorporating in the Rostow and Wallerstein models, show there are differing measures and goals of development.

Development Key Points

- There are multiple perspectives and it is important to consider them when developing curriculum
- Cultural sensitivity and teaching the ideals of cultural relativism are important foundations of cultural geography

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Advice: Before beginning lesson giving a disclaimer that these are the scientific theories, and that there are alternate explanations goes a long way. Telling students that you're providing the scientific theory and supportive evidence can go a long way. Don't attack religious teachings.

Evolution and Continental Drift Key Points

- Separate out scientific theory from potential theological debates
- Explain the definition of scientific theory and the importance of collecting supportive evidence
- Addressing it before it is even an issue

Case study - <https://online.ucpress.edu/abt/article/80/3/235/19077/The-Fight-to-Keep-Evolution-Out-of-Schools-The-Law>

Flat Earthers

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Advice: Do not address the topic in a way that would belittle the student for having questions. The student is curious, we want that. You can have the student ask their questions one by one and do further research if needed, but otherwise, one of the main concerns with Flat Earth theory is the unscientific process - instead of hypothesis-> Test-> Conclusion, they typically have a conclusion, then find evidence that supports that conclusion.

Flat Earthers Key Points

- Do not belittle students for being curious
- Teachers must be aware of conspiracy theories - students like them so teachers should be ready to address them
- Teachers are seen as authority figures

Case Study -

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/outcry-after-teens-hear-flat-earth-presentation-at-school/>



“First World” and “Third World” Countries

Situation: You walk by a colleagues classroom and overhear them talking about the situation in Afghanistan and hear them referring to the country as a “third world country,” but in your class you’ve been trying to train your students to use More Developed Country (MDC) and Less Developed Country (LDC).

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Advice: In a department meeting your could raise the topic. 1st and 3rd world is an outdated and often derogatory method of classifying countries. You could purpose MDC and LDC in the interest of departmental consistency

“First World” and “Third World” Countries

- Gain consistency among subjects and between departments
- Recognize connotations of labels

Case Study -

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/04/372684438/if-you-shouldnt-call-it-the-third-world-what-should-you-call-it>

Genocide and Ethnic Conflict

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Advice: Some topics are best if the students decide for themselves -> For this topic you could start with the definition of Genocide and then do historical analysis and look at the events and let the students decide whether or not actions constitute genocide. At a point it is also a teacher's right to take a stand and affirm genocide, or not (equally as important to "protect" the experience - as in don't classify something that is genocide that wrongly equates it to the experience of others)

Genocide/Ethnic Cleansing Key Point

- Look for reliable sources of information and official designations
- Be prepared for potential points of contention within different areas
 - Holocaust deniers
 - Armenian Genocide recognition
 - Genocide vs. Ethnic Cleansing

Case Study - <https://theconversation.com/i-was-an-expert-witness-against-a-teacher-who-taught-students-to-question-the-holocaust-116578>

Case Study - <https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/guidelines-for-teaching-the-holocaust>

Globalism

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Advice: You can always fall back to your curriculum on topics like this. Anything that is being politicized it is best to not take a stand one way or the other

Globalism

- When in doubt talk with administrators and curriculum directors for guidance
- If it is in the standards - keep in mind they have been approved by the state school board

Case Study - <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-08-12/education-must-focus-on-globalization>

Governmental & Economic Systems

Situation: A parent calls you up and complains you have not done enough to convince students that a particular economic/governmental doctrine is “evil.” From their explanations it is clear they are repeating talking points from a prevalent political commentator

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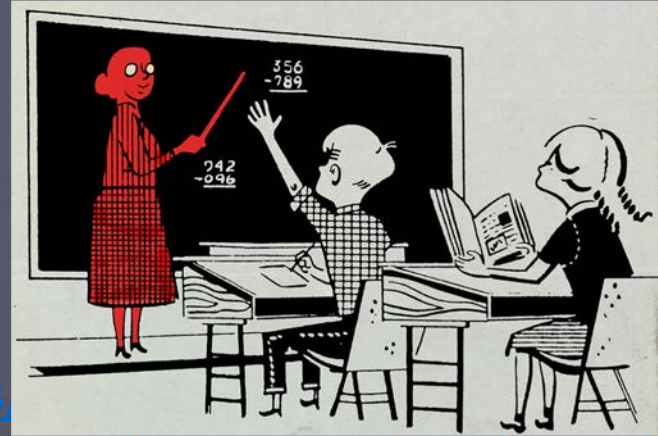
Advice: It is not your job to make up student’s minds - you give them facts and they make decisions one way or the other. The most difficult thing is you need to ensure you’re giving equal facts

Government/Economic Systems

- Present things in a balanced Pro/Con method
- Support with case studies

Case Study -

<https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/wants-public-schools-to-teach-the-horrors-of-communist-and-socialist-governments>



Imperialism/Colonialism

Situation: Students are torn, on one side the teacher is talking about the “sins” of colonialism and Imperialism and then on the other they recognize that their country and their place in it is a result of that systems. You can see they’re struggling with these ideas in their head.

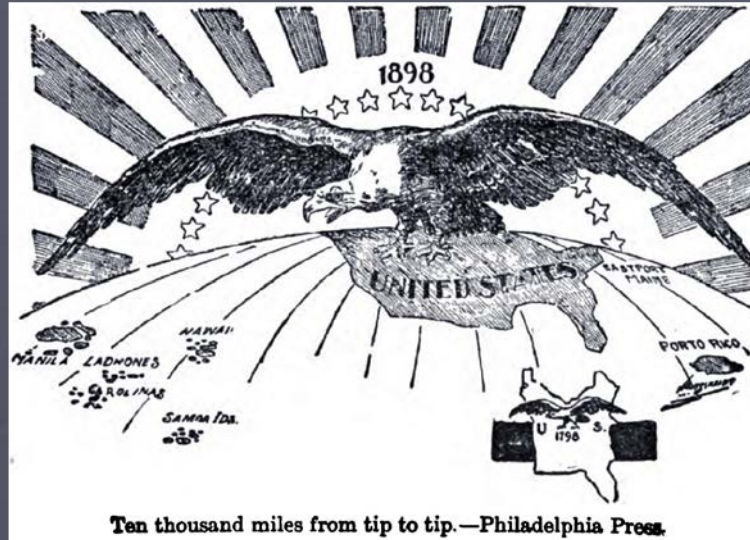
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Advice: A geographic analysis can be great to look at the distribution of colonized/imperialised countries and current demographic indicators can be a great way to discuss the effects globally - in the United States and Canada an analysis would have to be organized to show conditions in areas with predominant native populations vs. non-native. This can be a great set up to talk about issues such as the importance of treaties, and tribal sovereignty.

Imperialism Key Points

- Be prepared for the potential directions a lesson might go and plan accordingly
- Stick to data and definitions by reputable sources



Islam

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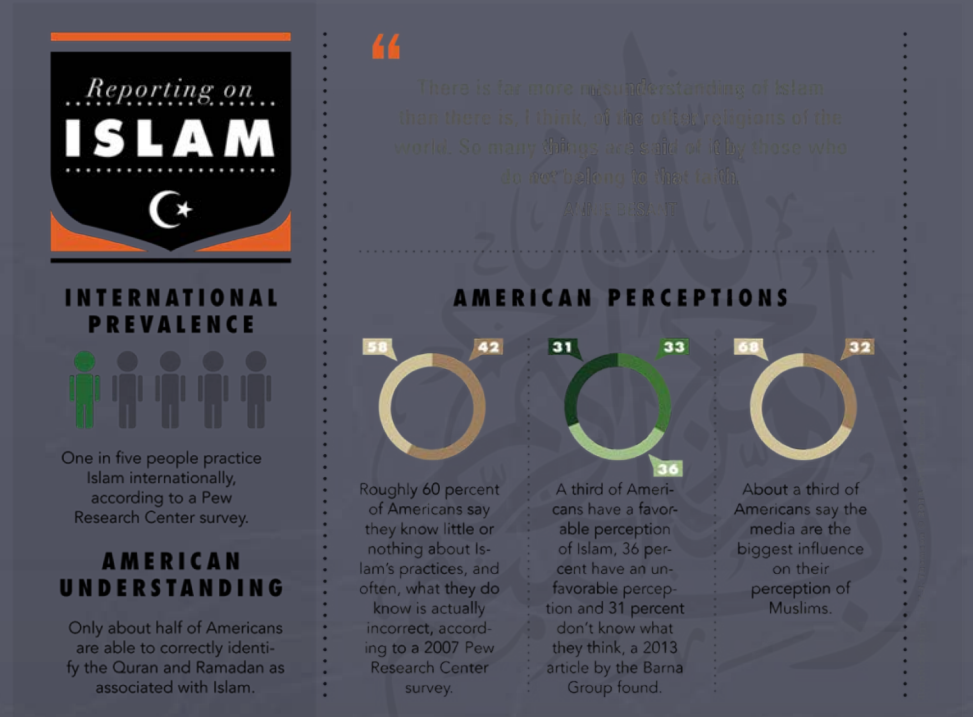
Advice: With Islam and Muslims the media has really influenced a lot of people's thinking. There needs to be differentiation between Muslims and Islamic extremists (as with any religion!)

Islam Key Points

- Balance when teaching religions is important
- Communicating with parents and establishing report can help make them feel comfortable coming to you with questions about curriculum

Case Study -

<https://www.fox46.com/news/parents-outraged-by-school-assignment-on-islam/>



Israel & Palestine

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Advice: As with any territorial dispute this is a great teaching moment to further investigate the root of the dispute and the geographic underpinnings. Assuring students this is a complex situation you will not be “solving” in your class, only better understanding it can help diffuse the situation!

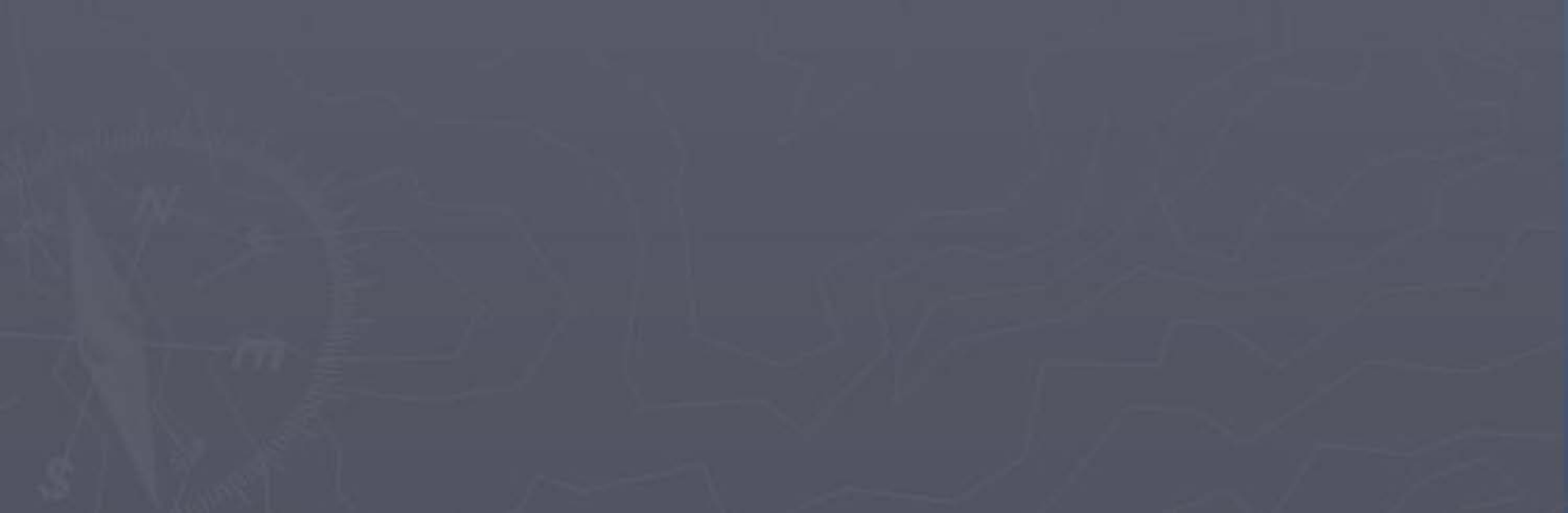
Israel & Palestine Key Points

- Complex global issues will most likely not be solved in your classroom, but their complexities can be better understood
- There is value in building context and understanding both sides of arguments
- Sources are important



Map Projections

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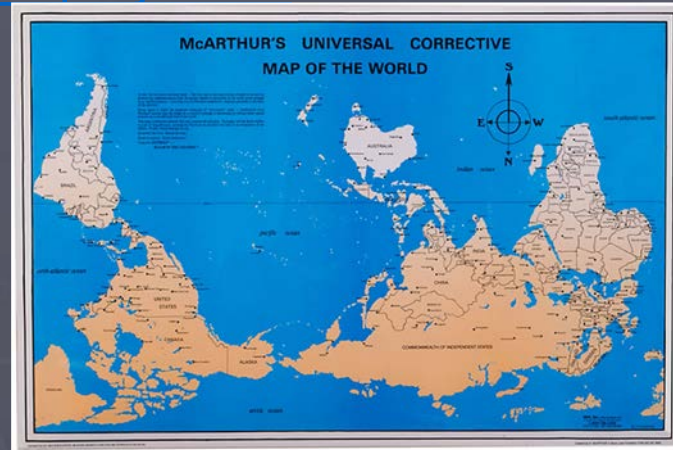
Advice: A great talking point and teaching moment, you can discuss with your students the map you hang up and go over the benefits and disadvantages of the particular projection. Maps can definitely be ways to portray power.

Map Projections Key Points

- Be aware of messages being sent with graphics and maps
- Maps are used as portrayals of power

Case Study -

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/mar/19/boston-public-schools-world-map-mercator-peters-projection>



Migration

Situation: While discussing refugees during a unit on migration a student exclaims that they should all just stay where they are and stop coming here to take jobs from Americans.

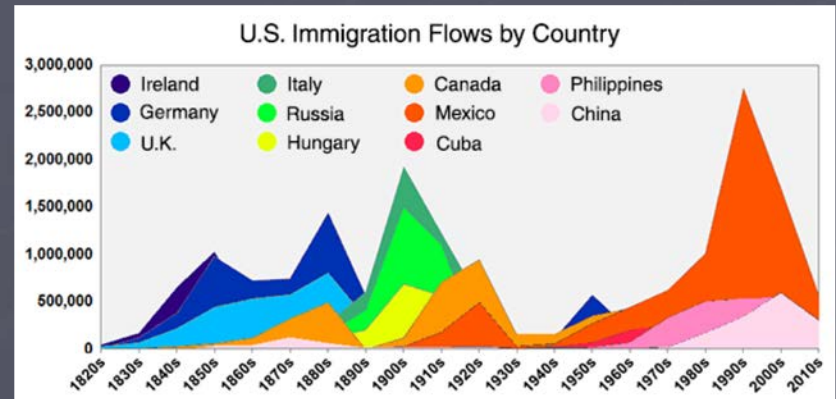
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Advice: There is so much misinformation thrown around, clarifying the difference between refugee, asylum seeker, and economic migrant is an important point to make

Migration

- One of the biggest challenges is re-teaching students terms used incorrectly on Tv
 - Especially the words migrant and Chain Migration
- Migration can be a personal issue for students
- Case study - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/us/politics/the-facts-behind-the-weaponized-phrase-chain-migration.html>



Native Rights

Situation: Students get into a discussion about Native American mascots while discussing demographic

Native Rights

Situation: Students get into a discussion about Native American mascots while discussing demographic, and some students begin sharing views that could best be described as ignorant

Advice: Don't fall into the trap of the "... and everybody else" in curriculum design. Make sure that different groups (especially historically marginalized groups) are well represented throughout the curriculum. Bring in historical context where needed and use multiple perspectives

Native Rights Key Points

- Avoid failing to “modernize” groups
 - Do not just mention historical examples, make sure current issues are mentioned as well
- Students may not have ever considered alternate viewpoints
- Ensure inclusive classroom
- Spread throughout curriculum



New Urbanism

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Advice: The student was impassioned and very much on point that there can be a lot of negatives for members of the community who already live there and often this can be a factor of race, but in geography there are often two sides that can be considered. If this could be a factor try disconnecting the situation from the United States and use a case study in another country.

New Urbanism Key Points

- Multiple viewpoints should be considered
- Choose case studies that work with students and can remove emotions
- Recognize topics “hit home” sometimes



Political Affiliations

Situation: While discussing Gerrymandering a student interjects that its a good thing because it gives their particular political party an edge.

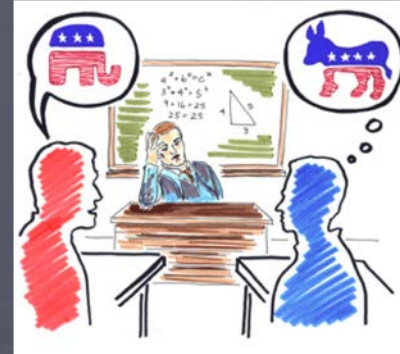
Political Affiliations

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Advice: Like religion, everyone has their own beliefs and is entitled to their beliefs. Increasingly these beliefs are being tied to their identity so as long as students are not attacking one another they should respect each others political affiliations.

Political Affiliation

- Teachers should avoid promoting political ideologies
- Encourage students to develop own political understandings
- Hate speech still not allowed



Case study - <https://mclellan.law.msu.edu/questions/confederate-flag>

Religions

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Advice: When it comes to religion think of the purpose of your lesson, if it is distribution stick to that, if it is more cultural and explaining religious differences than adding a disclaimer you're not promoting one religion over another and that you're simply presenting beliefs that should resolve most issues before they begin. Religions are very personal and should be promoted as such

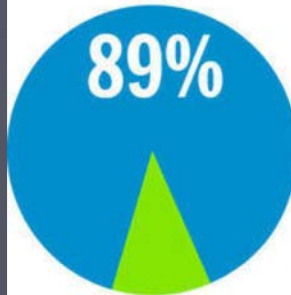
Religion Key Points

- Cultural Sensitivity and Understanding
 - Avoid images of certain religious figures
- Public vs. Private education and religious education
- Informing not preaching

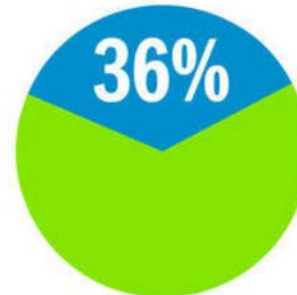
Teaching about religion in schools

PERCENTAGE WHO KNOW PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS...

CANNOT lead
class in prayer



CAN offer compara-
tive religion course



CAN read from Bible as
example of literature



SOURCE: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010

DESERET NEWS GRAPHIC

Sexuality/Gender

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Advice: Title IX provides federal guidance on Sex Discrimination in schools. Providing a safe space where all students feel comfortable to be included and can learn is an important role for an educator. By offering a geographic perspective students can contextualize the ideas of Sexuality and Gender a bit more to tie in the ideas of Cultural Relativism

Sexuality/Gender Key Points

- Providing a safe and equitable learning environment
- Remaining Title IX Compliant
- Providing global perspective



Stereotypes

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Advice: Early on the importance of supporting claims with data and evidence is important. Make sure you design assignments to incorporate evidence and data to avoid over-generalizations and stereotypes

Stereotypes Key Points

- Develop assignments that encourage use of geographic data
- Provide reputable sources for students to gather information

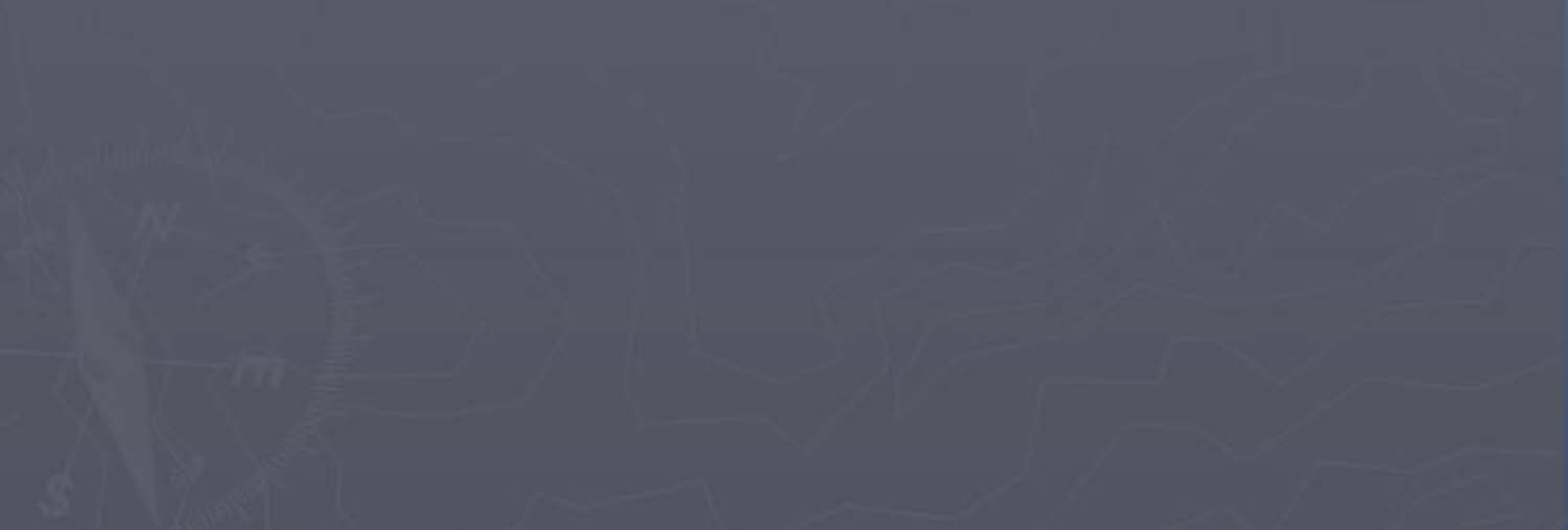


Population Reference Bureau



Territorial Disputes

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Advice: Territorial disputes can be issues of national pride, some are best to avoid, but finding one particular one to further study in-depth that you can use as a case study for the complexities of disputes can be a great way of introducing students to the topic.

Territorial Disputes Key Points

- Avoid taking sides on disputes
- Great for political geography discussion
- Territorial claims can be matters of national pride and emotional if student feels attacked

