TEACH DEMOCRACY

U.S., China, Taiwan

Civil Conversation Lesson Plan

Materials

- Handout A1: Middle School Text
- Handout A2: High School Text
- Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide
- Teacher Presentation

Standards and Topics

- CCSS.SL.6-12.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- CCSS.R.6-12.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- C3.D2.Civ.3.6-8. Examine the origins, purposes, and impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements.
- C3.D2.Civ.3.9-12: Analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order

Topics: U.S. foreign policy, U.S. history, China, Taiwan independence, world history, economics

Overview

In this Civil Conversation, students discuss the dynamics surrounding U.S. foreign policy on Taiwan. First, they examine a text that offers multiple perspectives on the U.S. defense of Taiwan. Next, they participate in a Civil Conversation on the text. In this structured discussion method, students are encouraged to engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight about their own point of view, and strive for a shared understanding of issues.

Objectives

1. Evaluate the implications of U.S. foreign policy in relation to Taiwan
2. Participate effectively in a civil discussion by expressing clear and persuasive arguments, while building on others' ideas
3. Consider other perspectives with a sense of empathy

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Have students make a list of five rights they believe every person should have in the world and explain why. Then, ask students to consider the following question: (1) What influenced your choices when creating your list of rights that you believe every person should have? (2) Do you believe that there are circumstances where certain rights could be limited or denied? Explain. (3) Whose responsibility is it to ensure these rights? Why?

B. Inform students that the U.S. has a long history of international involvement in the issue of Taiwanese independence from China. Tell students that they will examine the historical origins of the conflict. Their task today is to consider U.S. foreign policy on the issue by examining multiple perspectives.

II. Reading : U.S., China, Taiwan

A. Briefly provide students with an overview of the purpose and rationale of the Civil Conversation activity. Use the overview above to help you.

B. Give each student a copy of Handout A: The United States, China, and Taiwan

C. Distribute a copy of Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide to each student to complete as they read. Each student should fill in their own guide.

III. Civil Conversation

A. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. You may want to have each group select a leader who will get the discussion started, ensure the group stays on-task, and finishes on time.

B. Determine how much time the groups have to complete the discussion. (You will know what's best for your students, depending on the length of the reading and how experienced your students are in student-directed discussion.)

- **Time:** Conversations for classroom purposes should have a time limit, generally ranging from 15 to 45 minutes and an additional five minutes to reflect on the effectiveness of the conversations. The reflection time is an opportunity to ask any students who have not spoken to comment on the things they have heard. Ask them who said something that gave them a new insight that they agreed or disagreed with.
- **Small Groups:** This discussion strategy is designed to ensure the participation of every student. Groups of 3-4 students are ideal. If you are scaffolding text for various reading levels, group students who will use the same text together.

C. Review the rules of a Civil Conversation (listed under Step 3 on the Guide) and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the guide to get started.

D. Let groups know you will be circulating to listen in on their conversations and that each person in a group is expected to participate. The goal is for everyone to contribute equally to the conversation.

E. If necessary, remind groups of the time and urge them to move to the next steps.

IV. Assessment / Closure

A. After the groups have completed their discussions, debrief the activity by having the class reflect on the effectiveness of the conversation:

- What did you learn from the Civil Conversation?
- What common ground did you find with other members of the group?
- Ask all participants to suggest ways in which the conversation could be improved. If appropriate, have students add the suggestions to their list of conversation rules.

B. If you want to also debrief the content of the Civil Conversation, you might ask students:

- Was there any surprising information you learned from the reading? What was it?
- What are the merits or drawbacks of the different policy approaches with Taiwan?
- What do you think is the most important reason for the policy?

C. For assessment, look for the following on each student's Civil Conversation Guide:

Step 2 – A, B: Basic understanding of text.

Step 2 – C, D: Text-based arguments.

Step 2 – E: Appropriate and compelling questions about the text.

Step 4 – A: Level of participation (should be "about the same as others").

Step 4 – B: Answer is appropriately related to topic/issue presented in text.

Step 4 – C, D: Specificity/text-based.

D. For additional assessment, you may want to collect the article/text students used to assess the annotations they made in terms of connections to prior knowledge/experience, questions they had while reading, and comments they made.

U.S., CHINA, TAIWAN

The island of Taiwan is near **mainland** China. The people of Taiwan say that Taiwan is an independent country, but the government of China says Taiwan is part of China. The United States has supported Taiwan for many years. In recent years, China has said that it might invade the island. What should the U.S. do if that happens?

The Chinese Civil War and its Consequences

Beginning in 1927, there was a civil war in China between **communists** led by Mao Zedong and nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. In 1949, Mao's communists defeated Chiang's nationalists. Chiang and his followers fled to Taiwan, vowing to return to China one day and overthrow Mao's communist government.

The One China Policy

Both China and the United States say they support a "One China" policy. This means that they both say Taiwan is part of China. But the two countries have different ideas about how this should happen. China says that Taiwan must be united with mainland China by any means necessary. This could mean using force. The United States says that any unification must be done peacefully.

The Debate in the United States

There is a debate in the United States about how to prevent China from invading Taiwan. Some people think that the United States should keep its intentions unclear. This is called "strategic ambiguity." They think that if China does not know what the United States would do, China will be less likely to **invade** Taiwan.

Other people think that the United States should have "strategic clarity" or make it clear that it would defend Taiwan if China invaded. They think that this would **deter** China from invading Taiwan. This would include sending defensive weapons to Taiwan and the deployment of U.S. military naval, air, and land forces with the approval of Congress.

America's Interests

If China were to attempt to take over Tawain by force, how should the U.S. respond? Would a Chinese invasion of Taiwan present a threat to America's economy or national security?

If China invades Taiwan, it could hurt America's interests. Taiwan is a flourishing democracy with a population of 23 million people. It is also a major source of

Map of modern-day Taiwan (U.S. Department of State / Public Domain)

mainland land connected to a country

communists people who believe in a system of government and economics where people collectively own property

invade to go into another place using force

deter to stop something from happening

microchips, which are **essential** for many electronic devices, including computers, smartphones, automobiles and aircraft, and household appliances. Tawain produces most of the world's microchips.

If the United States did not defend Taiwan, it could make its allies in Asia feel insecure. But if the United States did defend Taiwan, it could lead to a war between China and the United States.

essential Something very important

commitments promises to do something

Arguments for Pledging to Defend

1. Strategic clarity sends a clear message to China about U.S. intentions and will dissuade China from using force.
2. The U.S. has a responsibility as a global power to defend its allies.
3. The U.S. should pledge to defend Taiwan, but only if (1) the U.S. also gives Taiwan defensive weapons and (2) gets **commitments** from other allies in the region to also defend Taiwan.
4. The U.S. should pledge to defend Taiwan, but only if Taiwan does not provoke China. (Provoking China could include Taiwan declaring its independence.)

Arguments Against Pledging to Defend

1. Strategic ambiguity has brought peace to Taiwan, China, and the U.S. for half a century.
2. Strategic clarity will provoke China, not deter China. China knows the U.S. is not militarily ready to commit to defending Taiwan.
3. China is a nuclear power. Even a slight risk of nuclear war is not worth the pledge.
4. A pledge to defend Taiwan will box the U.S. into a corner. If China ever invades Taiwan, the U.S. will need to assess the situation and decide the best course of action.

U.S., CHINA, TAIWAN

Since the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, the large island of Taiwan near **mainland** China has functioned as a nation. The Taiwanese people say that Taiwan is an independent country, but the communist government of China claims Taiwan is part of China. American foreign policy has supported Taiwan over the years. In recent years, China has indicated it might invade the island. What should the U.S. do if that happens?

The Chinese Civil War and its Consequences

Beginning in 1927, **communists** in China led by Mao Zedong and anti-communists led by Chiang Kai-shek fought a civil war. In 1949, Mao's communists defeated Chiang's anti-communists, who were also called Nationalists. Chiang and his followers then fled to Taiwan, vowing to return someday to the mainland and overthrow Mao's communist regime.

Mao claimed Taiwan was always a part of China and must be unified with the mainland. Mainland China was fully under the control of Mao's communist regime and called the People's Republic of China (aka China). In the meantime, Chiang established his own Nationalist government on the island of Taiwan, which he called the Republic of China (ROC).

In the mid-1950s, during the Eisenhower presidency, the first of several military crises occurred in the Taiwan Strait, the waterway separating Taiwan from mainland China. As a result of this crisis, the U.S. and Taiwan agreed to the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954. Approved by Congress, this treaty **authorized** the American president to use military force, if necessary, to protect territories in the Taiwan Strait. It also proclaimed a "Two China" policy, with Taiwan as an independent nation allied with the United States.

The One China Policy

The Cold War made both communist China and its communist Soviet Union ally enemies of the United States. By the 1970s, there was a growing split between China and the Soviet Union. Seeing an opportunity to take advantage of the split, in 1971, U.S. President Richard Nixon sent his national security advisor Henry Kissinger to have secret talks with Chou Enlai, China's prime minister.

Soon after Kissinger's meeting, Nixon himself made a trip to China in 1972 to meet with Mao. This historic meeting overturned U.S. recognition of Taiwan's independence.

Map of modern-day Taiwan (U.S. Department of State / Public Domain)

mainland land connected to a country

communists people who believe in a system of government and economics where people collectively own property

authorized to give permission

Several years later, U.S. President Jimmy Carter built upon Nixon's Shanghai Communique, and he canceled the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty that had assured U.S. military defense of Taiwan. Then, Congress passed, and Carter signed the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 that modified and even reversed U.S. official policy on Taiwan and China. Key **provisions** included:

- The U.S. will maintain unofficial relations with the "governing authorities" of Taiwan.
- The U.S. will provide military aid to Taiwan for its self-defense.
- The U.S. declares that the future of Taiwan must only be determined by "peaceful means."

provisions rules or conditions

deployment sending people or things to a specific area

Strategic Ambiguity or Clarity

Today, both China and the U.S. say they support a "One China" policy. For China, it has always meant that Taiwan is a breakaway province. Taiwan must be united with the communist mainland by any means necessary. A use of force, the Chinese government says, will be necessary if Taiwan ever declares its independence.

For the U.S., "One China" is more ambiguous, or less clear. The U.S. says it "acknowledges" that Taiwan is part of China, but any unification must be done through peaceful negotiations acceptable to the Taiwanese people. The U.S. opposes Taiwan declaring itself an independent nation.

For many years, the U.S. has provided defensive weapons (such as anti-tank missiles) and training to Taiwan's military. While the U.S. has promised to come to the aid of Taiwan in case of a Chinese invasion, it is not clear what this means.

Currently, there is a debate in the U.S. over how best to prevent China from invading Taiwan. Those in favor of "strategic ambiguity" argue that to prevent a Chinese attack, the U.S. should keep its intentions unclear. If China must guess what the U.S. would do, China will be deterred from invading Taiwan.

On the other side of the debate are those in favor of "strategic clarity." They say the U.S. should make clear to China that America would respond militarily to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan to deter China from invading. This would include defensive weapons and **deployment** of U.S. military naval, air, and land forces with the approval of Congress.

America's Interests

If China were to attempt to take over Taiwan by force, how should the U.S. respond? Would a Chinese invasion of Taiwan present a threat to America's commercial and national security interests?

Taiwan is a flourishing democracy with a population of 23 million people. It has strong trade ties with the U.S., especially as a source for microchips, a commercial interest to the United States and the world. Microchips are essential for virtually all electronics, including computers, smartphones, automobiles and aircraft, and household appliances. Taiwan produces most of the world's microchips.

If China invades Taiwan, what would be the United States' best interest? If the U.S. did not defend Taiwan against China, it could make its Asian allies, like Japan and

South Korea, feel insecure. But if the U.S. did defend Taiwan, it could cause a major war between China and the U.S. and allies on both sides.

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Name: _____

U.S., China, Taiwan

Civil Conversation Guide

Step 1: Read.

A. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section.

B. Re-read the selection and annotate ("talk to") the text:

- Underline the main/most important points. You can comment on these points in the margins.
- Circle words or phrases that are unknown or confusing to you.
- Write down any questions you have in the margin labeling them with a "?".
- Draw an ➡ in the margin next to text that connects to something you know from outside the text. Note what the connection is, such as a news item or personal experience.

Step 2: Think about the reading to prepare for the discussion.

A. This reading is about...

B. The MAIN POINTS are:

Should the United States pledge to defend Taiwan?

C. In the reading, I agree with:

D. In the reading, I disagree with:

E. What are two questions about this reading that you think could be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer and that can use the text as evidence.)

1.

2.

Step 3: Discuss and Listen.

You will have _____ minutes to discuss. Your goal is to engage with each other and the text to gain insight about your own point of view while finding a shared understanding of the issue.

Start by taking turns sharing your answers to the questions in Step 2, sections A-D. Then, you will likely find at least one discussion question at the end of the reading. If time permits, you can discuss questions you came up with in Section E above.

Rules for a Civil Conversation

1. Everyone in your group should participate in the conversation.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying
3. Ask clarifying questions if your do not understand a point raised
4. Be respectful of what others are saying.
5. Refer to the text to support your ideas.

Step 4: After your conversation...

A. Compared to others in your group, did you speak? ___ Less than, ___ About the same as, ___ More than others.

B. Note some of the ways you added to the discussion.

C. What evidence did you use from the text to add to the discussion? Why was this evidence helpful?

D. What did you learn about the topic from the Civil Conversation? (Be sure to reference the text!)