Unit 2: The Minimum Wage

Overview
The current federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour was set by Congress more than five years ago. Since 2009, the minimum wage has lost about 5.8% of its purchasing power to inflation. More than half of the states have voted to increase the minimum wage within their borders, and some cities have set a rate higher than their own states; for example, the minimum wage in Illinois is $8.25 and Chicago has set the minimum wage to go to $10.00 as of July 1, 2015. Several states have voted to allow the minimum wage to change with the cost-of-living, but any change to the national minimum wage must pass through Congress. Currently, the minimum wage, unlike Social Security, does not automatically go up as the price of basic goods rises.

In this unit, students explore whether Congress should pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act. The act (1) raises the minimum wage in three steps, from $7.25 to $10.10 per hour, and (2) once the minimum wage reaches $10.10, indexes the rate to inflation each year thereafter. This means that if the cost of living rises, the minimum wage will be adjusted annually to reflect that increase. (A third part of the act deals with the required minimum wage for tipped workers, such as wait staff.)

The unit begins with a human graph activity, in which students show their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about the minimum wage. They then read and discuss a background briefing on the minimum wage and analyze graphs that could be used to support a particular position on the Fair Minimum Wage Act. After preparing a position statement on the issue, students take part in a simulated town meeting held by members of Illinois' congressional delegation to gather input from citizens.

Focus Question
Should the U.S. Congress pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act to raise the minimum wage and index it to the cost of living?

Objectives
Students will be able to:

- Explain the history of the federal minimum wage and how it is adjusted in the United States.
- Identify arguments for and against raising the federal minimum wage and indexing it to the cost of living.
- Analyze data in graphic form and determine which position on the Fair Minimum Wage Act the data supports.
- Take and defend a position on Fair Minimum Wage Act.
Common Core State Standards
This unit addresses the following Common Core State Standards:

- Reading: Key Ideas and Details (CCRA.R.2): Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCRA.R.7): Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCRA.R.8): Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Writing: Text Types and Purposes (CCRA.W.1): Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration (CCRA.SL.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.
- Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (CCRA.SL.4): Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Materials
2A: Activity: The Minimum Wage: Interpreting a Human Graph
2B: Activity: Using Data to Evaluate the Fair Minimum Wage Act
2C: Reading: Evaluating The Fair Minimum Wage Act
2D: Primary Source: The Fair Minimum Wage Act
2E: Data Packet: Graphs Related to the Fair Minimum Wage Act
2F: Handout: Building an Argument
2G: Activity: Town Meeting
2H: Handout: Preparing for and Conducting the Town Meeting
2I: Handout: Student Reflection on Town Meeting and Focus Question

The Minimum Wage: Selected Resources
2A: Activity: The Minimum Wage: Interpreting a Human Graph

Objective

Students define the term minimum wage and learn the term indexing. To stimulate students’ thinking about the minimum wage, they then construct and interpret a human graph in response to a series of statements about the minimum wage.

Procedure

- Ask students if they know what the term minimum wage means. (Work toward a definition along the lines of “a government-mandated minimum pay rate that workers must be paid.”) Explain that different levels of government can set a minimum wage that must be followed within their borders. States cannot have a lower rate than the federal government, but they can set a higher minimum wage; similarly, cities can set higher rates than their states. More than half the states, including Illinois, have higher minimum wages than the federal rate. Write the following wages on the board: $7.25, $8.25, $10.00 (as of July 1, 2015). Ask students to identify which rate is the federal rate ($7.25), the Illinois rate ($8.25), and the Chicago rate ($10.00).

- Point out that the federal rate has not been raised since 2009 and that this fact is causing controversy. Currently, Congress must act in order for the rate to go up. Some observers argue that the rate should instead be tied to the cost of living, with annual increases in the minimum wage when prices go up. This is called indexing.

- Tell students that they are going to construct and interpret a human graph. Put up signs across the front of the room saying “Strongly Agree,” “Somewhat Agree,” “Undecided,” “Somewhat Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” Ask for about ten volunteers to serve on the human graph. When they have come to the front of the room, explain that they will be standing in front of one of the signs to show their response to a series of statements that you will read. The students on the line will not speak; instead, the remainder of the students will interpret the graph they have created. Make sure students understand the directions.

- Begin by reading the first statement below and asking the volunteers to choose where they will stand (no standing between the signs!). Then ask seated students to interpret the graph. Stimulate discussion by asking such questions as: How would you summarize our class response to this statement? Why do you think so few students chose to stand in front of the ________ sign? Why do you think so many students chose to stand in front of the ________ sign? Follow the same pattern with the remaining statements. You may want to ask for a new set of graph volunteers midway through the list.

a. The minimum wage should be linked to the cost of living. Right now the minimum wage is worth less than when it was passed years ago because of inflation.

b. Annual cost-of-living increases in the minimum wage will hurt businesses.

c. A fair minimum wage should be a right for all workers.
d. The minimum wage should not be based on a national average. The cost of living is not the same in Chicago as it is in Alabama or Alaska or even in small Illinois towns like Rochelle or Anna.
e. Increasing wages will help businesses because better paid workers will buy more things and increase business profits.
f. We shouldn’t waste time trying to change the federal minimum wage. We already have higher minimum wages in Illinois and Chicago.
g. There should be no minimum wage set by the government. Your wage should be an agreement between you and your employer.
h. Political polarization prevents Congress from acting on this issue. Indexing the minimum wage to the cost of living would keep people in minimum wage jobs from being forced to wait for Congress.

- Have students return to their seats and explain that the statements students responded to are some basic arguments on both sides of the unit’s focus question: Should the U.S. Congress pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act to raise the minimum wage and index it to the cost of living? The class will be exploring that question in greater depth.
- As a follow-up, interested students could explore public opinion data about the issue of the minimum wage. One interesting poll is a Reason-Rupe Public Opinion Survey from April 4, 2014: http://reason.com/assets/db/13964619214696.pdf.
2B: Activity: Using Data to Evaluate the Fair Minimum Wage Act

Objective
Students read and discuss a background briefing on the minimum wage. Through a jigsaw activity, they analyze several graphs providing data that support arguments for or against the Fair Minimum Wage Act. Based on the reading and graph analysis, they write an argument supporting a position for or against passage of the Fair Minimum Wage Act.

Procedures
- Tell students that a full-time worker (40 hours per week) making the minimum wage of $7.25 makes about $1250 a month. Have students suggest the bills that would need to be paid from that income and draw conclusions about its adequacy. Then ask students to consider a small business owner who pays three full-time workers the minimum wage. Challenge students to calculate how much payroll would go up each month if the minimum wage rose to $10.10 (it would go up from about $3750 to $5250). Ask students how this might affect the business owner.
- Organize students into six groups and distribute Reading 2C. You may also want to give students a copy of the proposed Fair Minimum Wage Act (Primary Source 2D); help students understand that reading the Act may be somewhat confusing because it is actually an amendment, or change, to an existing law, the Fair Labor Standards Act. Direct students to read and discuss the information in the reading as a group. When students have completed their discussion, ask them to report on the data they thought would be needed to test the arguments for and against the Fair Minimum Wage Act. If they have difficulty with this task, talk through how the two graphs in the reading help illustrate the arguments on the two sides. Then ask them what kind of information would help them better understand the other arguments given in the reading.
- Distribute the Data Packet and assign one graph to each of the six groups. Groups that finish their analysis early can look at another graph of their own choosing.
- Allow time for the six groups to present their graphs. When all have presented, discuss with students the fact that there are often conflicting studies on the same topic. Acknowledge that for citizens who do not have sophisticated statistical or research skills, it can be difficult to decide which studies are more credible. Recognizing any bias on the part of the organization that did the study or is publicizing it can be one way to gauge how much credence to give a particular study.
- Conduct a general discussion of students' views on the unit focus question based on the information they have gathered: Should the U.S. Congress pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act to raise the minimum wage and index it to the cost of living?
- Distribute Handout 2D and explain that it provides an outline to help them write a well-structured argument for their position. If students' views were too heavily skewed to one side of the question, ask some volunteers to write position statements for the opposing view in order to have some good arguments prepared on both sides. Allow time for students to prepare their arguments.
Reading 2C: Evaluating the Fair Minimum Wage Act

Sandra Amaya, a single mother with two teenagers, lives in Houston, Texas. She works 13 hours a day—eight hours as a hotel maid and five hours as a janitor in an office building. Both jobs pay just above minimum wage, giving Amaya take-home pay of around $1700 per month. Her rent is $500 and utilities are $200. The rest of her pay must stretch to cover food, transportation, clothes, and the other costs of raising two teenagers. Both of her children want to go to college, but it is hard to save on Amaya's salary. She believes an increase in the federal minimum wage would be a big help to her and others in her situation.

Judith Gethner is the executive director of Illinois Partners for Human Service, an organization that works with social service groups that provide care for people in need. She points out that these groups receive most of the funds that pay salaries of care-givers from the state. Given Illinois' many budget problems, she worries that a higher minimum wage without higher funding from the state could mean layoffs and, ultimately, fewer services provided. “What we really want to do morally and ethically is pay the living wage, but our hands are tied,” Gethner said. “If you increase the minimum wage by law, and you don’t on the other side increase the money . . . then you hurt our sector significantly.”

These two stories illustrate some of the reasons why people argue both for and against regularly raising the minimum wage to reflect changes in the cost of living. Which arguments are stronger? Answering that question requires more background information.

The History of the Minimum Wage

The first federal minimum wage was established in 1933 as part of New Deal legislation that was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court just two years later. In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which re-established a minimum wage, among other provisions. This time, the Supreme Court ruled that the Commerce Clause of the Constitution gave Congress the power to regulate employment conditions.

How much was that first minimum wage? Twenty-five cents an hour. That doesn’t seem like much by today’s standards, but for people who had been working for 17 cents an hour, it was a good boost.

From that time until today, the idea of the government guaranteeing a minimum wage has been controversial. Over those years, some people have tried to limit or abolish the minimum wage. Others have argued that increases in the minimum wage should be made regularly.

Since 1938, Congress has raised the minimum wage more than 20 times. For the minimum wage to go up, Congress must pass a bill to amend the FLSA. The minimum wage does not go up when the cost of living goes up. It only goes up when Congress takes action. The minimum wage did not go up between 1981 and 1990 or between 1997 and 2007, the two longest periods without an increase in U.S. history.
The last time Congress took action to raise the minimum wage was in 2007. The 2007 amendments raised the minimum wage each year for three years, reaching $7.25 in 2009. The minimum wage has stayed at $7.25 since July 2009. These amendments also allowed states to set a higher minimum wage than the federal government. Today, more than half the states have minimum wage rates higher than the national rate. A number of states tie their minimum wage to the cost of living.

In 2014, President Obama called on Congress to raise the minimum wage. Shortly afterwards, he signed an executive order raising the minimum wage for employees of companies with new government contracts to $10.10 per hour. The vast majority of American minimum wage workers, however, are still making $7.25 per hour.

**Fair Minimum Wage Act**

The Fair Minimum Wage Act currently being considered was first proposed in 2011. The Act would raise the minimum wage in three steps, from $7.25 to $10.10 per hour. Once the minimum wage reaches $10.10, the Act would index the minimum wage to inflation each year thereafter. That means the minimum wage would go up with the cost of living.

Is this plan a good idea? That question is hotly debated.

**The Arguments in Favor of the Fair Minimum Wage Act**

Supporters of the Fair Minimum Wage Act (FMWA) say that the real value of the minimum wage—what the money is worth in current dollars—has gone down since it was set at $7.25 in 2009. As prices have gone up, the income that minimum wage workers earn buys less. Minimum wage workers are trying to care for their families on income that is below the poverty level. In this time of growing income inequality, supporters argue, leaving these millions of hard-working Americans in poverty is indefensible. It only makes sense to raise the minimum wage to make up for the loss in purchasing power and then to make sure the minimum wage goes up when the cost of living rises.


Supporters of the FMWA point out that the recent history of Congressional action on the minimum wage—nine years of no change, followed by ten years, followed by nearly six years and counting—provides a strong argument for indexing the minimum wage to the cost of
living. A Congress in which the parties are trying to score points rather than meet the needs of working Americans cannot be trusted to take regular action on the minimum wage. Regular adjustments should be built into the law—just as they are with Social Security payments.

Supporters also dispute the claim by some that raising the minimum wage will hurt the economy by putting people out of work. Supporters cite a 2013 Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) report that said raising the minimum wage did not significantly affect employment. The report said the higher wages were balanced in part by lower turnover and greater efficiency. Workers who are paid better are more likely to stay on a job and to work hard. Another factor balancing higher wages is small price increases. A CEPR study in 2014 found that job growth was actually faster in states with higher minimum wages.

In addition, supporters argue that indexing can actually be helpful to businesses. If the minimum wage is tied to the cost of living, business owners can plan ahead for their labor costs. They won’t be surprised by Congress suddenly writing in a large increase after a period of no change.

Supporters point out that the public is in favor of raising the minimum wage. In January 2014, the Pew Center polled Americans regarding their support for raising the minimum wage. They found that 73% of Americans supported raising the rate to $10.10. A majority of both Democrats and Republicans favored the increase, but Democratic support was much higher (90% compared to 53%). The same year, more than 600 economists signed a letter supporting raising the minimum wage. They argued, among other claims, that the increased money spent by low-wage workers would help business by increasing demand for products.

**The Arguments Against the Fair Minimum Wage Act**

Opponents of the FMWA say raising the minimum wage and indexing it to the cost of living will have a negative overall impact on the economy. They cite a 2014 Congressional Budget Office report that said raising the minimum wage to $10.10 would cost the U.S. economy 500,000 jobs. Why? Because employers would not be able to pay the higher minimum wage to as many workers. According to the Cato Institute, the pattern of lost jobs can be traced as far back as 1938, when the 25-cent minimum wage was imposed. The people who will lose their jobs are the very people whom the higher minimum wage is supposed to help—low-wage workers. Many of these people will be teenagers. Should we penalize young people who want to work by reducing the number of jobs available to them?

Source: *Debate.org*
One reason the Cato Institute gives for opposing raising the minimum wage is that their research suggests it will have no effect on poverty rates. They say that many low-wage workers, including teenagers, do not live in poverty because they are not the breadwinners for their families. Thus, raising their wages does not affect poverty in any significant way.

Another argument made in opposition to raising the minimum wage is the possible effect on prices. Because labor costs will be higher, prices will also rise. According to a 2007 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, restaurant prices go up when the minimum wage increases.

Opponents also make the case that the economy is different from state to state. In fact, it varies a lot even within states. Making sure that the minimum wage is high enough to keep pace with the cost of living should thus be a state issue. More than half the states have already set their minimum wage rates higher than the national rate. Within some states, counties and cities set even higher rates because the cost of living is higher in those areas. The federal level should be a general safety net that should not go up unless Congress sees that it is absolutely necessary. In addition, opponents say, cost of living increases cannot take other factors into account. When Congress acts to increase the minimum wage, it can think about the overall health of the economy and the effects of natural disasters—not just inflation.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which story—Sandra Amaya’s or Judith Gethner’s—do you find more compelling? Explain your answer.
2. What conclusions, if any, do you draw from the history of the minimum wage for what should be done today?
3. What does the first graph tell you about the relationship between the minimum wage and poverty?
4. What does the second graph tell you about the relationship between the minimum wage and youth unemployment?
5. What additional data would you need to evaluate the arguments made for and against the Fair Minimum Wage Act?

References:


Hicks, Michael J., “Who Lost Jobs When the Minimum Wage Rose?” Policy Brief (Fort Wayne, IN: Ball State University Center for Business and Economics Research, 2010), http://cms.bsu.edu//media/WWW/DepartmentalContent/MillerCollegeofBusiness/BBR/Publications/MinWage.pdf.


113th CONGRESS
1st Session

H. R. 1010
To provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

A BILL

To provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
This Act may be cited as the “Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013”.

SEC. 2. MINIMUM WAGE INCREASES.

(a) Minimum wage.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(a)(1)) is amended to read as follows:

“(1) except as otherwise provided in this section, not less than—

“(A) $8.20 an hour, beginning on the first day of the third month that begins after the date of enactment of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 Act;

“(B) $9.15 an hour, beginning 1 year after that first day;

“(C) $10.10 an hour, beginning 2 years after that first day; and

“(D) beginning on the date that is 3 years after that first day, and annually thereafter, the amount determined by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (h);".

(2) DETERMINATION BASED ON INCREASE IN THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX.—Section 6 of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(h)(1) Each year, by not later than the date that is 90 days before a new minimum wage determined under subsection (a)(1)(D) is to take effect, the Secretary shall determine the minimum wage to be in effect pursuant to this subsection for the subsequent 1-year period. The wage determined pursuant to this subsection for a year shall be—

“(A) not less than the amount in effect under subsection (a)(1) on the date of such determination;

“(B) increased from such amount by the annual percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (United States city average, all
items, not seasonally adjusted), or its successor publication, as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics; and

“(C) rounded to the nearest multiple of $0.05.

“(2) In calculating the annual percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for purposes of paragraph (1)(B), the Secretary shall compare such Consumer Price Index for the most recent month, quarter, or year available (as selected by the Secretary prior to the first year for which a minimum wage is in effect pursuant to this subsection) with the Consumer Price Index for the same month in the preceding year, the same quarter in the preceding year, or the preceding year, respectively.”.

(b) BASE MINIMUM WAGE FOR TIPPED EMPLOYEES.—Section 3(m)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 203(m)(1)) is amended to read as follows:

“(1) the cash wage paid such employee, which for purposes of such determination shall be not less than—

“(A) for the 1-year period beginning on the first day of the third month that begins after the date of enactment of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, $3.00 an hour;

“(B) for each succeeding 1-year period until the hourly wage under this paragraph equals 70 percent of the wage in effect under section 6(a)(1) for such period, an hourly wage equal to the amount determined under this paragraph for the preceding year, increased by the lesser of—

“(i) $0.95; or

“(ii) the amount necessary for the wage in effect under this paragraph to equal 70 percent of the wage in effect under section 6(a)(1) for such period, rounded to the nearest multiple of $0.05; and

“(C) for each succeeding 1-year period after the year in which the hourly wage under this paragraph first equals 70 percent of the wage in effect under section 6(a)(1), the amount necessary to ensure that the wage in effect under this paragraph remains equal to 70 percent of the wage in effect under section 6(a)(1), rounded to the nearest multiple of $0.05; and”.

(c) PUBLICATION OF NOTICE.—Section 6 of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (as amended by subsection (a)) (29 U.S.C. 206) is further amended by adding at the end the following:

“(i) Not later than 60 days prior to the effective date of any increase in the minimum wage determined under subsection (h) or required for tipped employees in accordance with subparagraph (B) or (C) of section 3(m)(1), as amended by the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register and on the website of the Department of Labor a notice announcing the adjusted required wage.”

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsections (a) and (b) shall take effect on the first day of the third month that begins after the date of enactment of this Act.

Data Packet 2E: Graphs on the Fair Minimum Wage Act

Directions: Your teacher will give each group one graph or set of graphs that will help you evaluate an argument for or against the Fair Minimum Wage Act. With your group, look carefully at the graph. Use these questions to guide your analysis of the graph:

1. According to the title, what does the graph show?

2. What is the source of the graph? Is this an unbiased source, or does the source have a particular point of view?

3. Look carefully at the labels on the graph. What are the units of measurement shown on the graph? Are comparisons being made? If so, what are they?

4. Describe what the data on the graph show.

5. Write a sentence summarizing what the graph shows.

6. Does the data support the arguments for or against the Fair Minimum Wage Act? Could the data be used by both sides? Explain your answer.

Decide how you will present the information on your graph to the rest of the class.
Graphs 1 and 2: Who Are the Minimum Wage Workers?

Graph #1

RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE WOULD
BENEFIT MORE THAN 28 MILLION WORKERS, AND DIRECTLY BOOST THE
WAGES OF 19 MILLION WORKERS FROM ALL TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS

UNDER 18
3.4 MIL

MARRIED
WITH KIDS
4.6 MIL

UNMARRIED
WITH KIDS
2.8 MIL

UNMARRIED
WITHOUT KIDS
12.4 MIL

MARRIED
WITHOUT KIDS
4.9 MIL

12%
16%
10%
44%
18%


Graph #2

Distribution of Minimum-Wage Workers by Age Group

Source: Pew Research Center, based on Bureau of Labor statistics
Graph 3: Purchasing Power of the Minimum Wage

Federal Minimum Wage, 1938-2012
Shown in adjusted 2012 dollars and unadjusted dollars

Note: Wage rates adjusted for inflation using implicit price deflator for personal consumption expenditures.
Source: Labor Department, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Pew Research Center analysis

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Graph 4: Minimum Wage Increases and Employment

Graph 5: Job Growth in States that Raised Their Minimum Wage Rates in 2014
Graph 6: Employers’ Predictions on How They Would Respond to a Higher Minimum Wage
Building a strong argument requires knowledge of the issue, including the arguments on both sides. It also requires clear thinking. Using guidelines like those below can help you organize and clarify your ideas.

## I. Introduction

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>GRAB your audience with a powerful question, anecdote, quote, etc. You probably will not want to write this grabber until after you have worked through your arguments. But save space/time for it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>State the focus question and your position clearly.</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>Briefly list three reasons policymakers should take your position.</td>
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## II. Reason 1

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<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Explain your first reason. Use an example, evidence, or personal story to support your reason.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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## III. Reason 2

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<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Explain your second reason. Use an example, evidence, or personal story to support your reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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## IV. Reason 3

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<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Explain your third reason. Use an example, evidence, or personal story to support your reason.</td>
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<td>B.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Provide additional detail.</td>
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## V. Countering the Opposition

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<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Acknowledge the best argument of the opposition and then . . .</td>
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<td>B.</td>
<td>Explain why that argument does not hold up to closer scrutiny.</td>
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</table>

## VI. Conclusion

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<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Bring the entire argument together in a very brief conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>End with a PUNCH. Then go back and write your grabber.</td>
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</table>
2G: Activity: Town Meeting

Objective
In this activity, students take part in a simulated town meeting to discuss with elected officials whether they support the Fair Minimum Wage Act. The activity will give students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the arguments on both sides of the issue.

Procedures
1. Tell students that members of Congress are holding town meetings around the state to find out what people think about the Fair Minimum Wage Act. A town meeting provides members of a community an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of their leaders. In this case, it will be advisory in nature, providing elected representatives with the views of citizens.

2. Have students work in groups of three or four. Organize the town meeting by assigning groups to each of the following roles:
   a. Members of the Illinois congressional delegation, including some who support the legislation and some who oppose it.
   b. Community members
      i. Possible roles include: young people, small business owners, representatives of labor unions, economists from the state university, people who run nonprofits funded by the state, minimum wage workers who work in fast-food, researchers at a think tank who oppose the minimum wage, etc.
      ii. Alternatively, you may want to let students present their own opinions at the town meeting.

3. Allow time for students to prepare for the town meeting. Students representing the members of the Congress can plan the agenda (see Handout 2H) and prepare brief opening remarks and questions they might ask. Students representing citizens can plan their presentations using arguments prepared in the previous activity. If time permits, students can interview community members to find out about their views and do additional research to strengthen their arguments.

4. Invite local legislators, school board members, parents, and school administrators to serve as resource persons or observers.

5. Have the students assigned as members of Congress conduct the town meeting according to Handout 2H.

6. Debrief the town meeting using the following questions:
   --What were the most compelling reasons for each side?
   --Were there any areas of agreement?
   --What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?
   --What are some reasons why discussing this issue is important in a democracy?
7. Have students complete the individual reflections on the town meeting and the focus question (Handout 2i). The final question on the handout asks students to compose a tweet and design a hashtag that would bring attention to the issue. Interested students may want to investigate how social media and particular hashtags have been used to advance particular positions on this issue.
2H: Handout: Preparing for and Conducting the Town Meeting

As the organizers of the town meeting, the members of Congress will organize the agenda and conduct the meeting.

Prepare for the Town Meeting:

1. Set an agenda for the meeting. Below is an agenda for the meeting that you can adapt and expand.

2. Establish a time limit for each group’s presentation and include these times in the agenda. Also consider setting rules for the meeting on how community members will be called upon to speak and how/if they may ask questions or make comments.

3. Decide on the order of group presentations (e.g., all the people on one side present, followed by people on the other side; or alternating between presentations by supporters and opponents.)

4. Decide when you will ask questions (e.g., after each presentation or after all the presentations have been). Be aware that some community members may also wish to ask questions.

5. Prepare opening remarks.

   Sample Agenda
   
   Opening Remarks by Senators and Representatives
   Review of Rules for the Town Meeting
   Presentations by Community Members
   Question-and-Answer Period
   Open Discussion

Conduct the Town Meeting:

1. Following the outline of events on your agenda, you may begin by providing a brief summary of the Fair Minimum Wage Act. Members for and against the law can make brief statements about their views.

2. Review with community members the time limits and any other rules of the meeting you have established.

3. Invite community members to present their opinions and listen carefully to their concerns and opinions.

4. Ask questions of community member presenters that are respectful of their opinions and show that you have listened to their comments and concerns.

5. After all groups have made their presentations, facilitate an open discussion in which community members can address questions to each other and to you.

6. At the end of the town meeting, you may choose to share your views, or simply take the information that you have gathered “under advisement.”

21: Handout: Student Reflection on Town Meeting and Focus Question

1. Which number best describes your understanding of the focus issue after the town meeting? [circle one]


2. What new insights did you gain?

3. What did you do well during the town meeting? What could you do better?

4. What did someone else in the class do or say that was particularly helpful?

5. Has your view of the issue changed as a result of taking part in the town meeting? Compare your views now to those at the beginning of the unit. Explain any changes in your view.

6. Compose a tweet (140 characters) that reflects your view on the unit focus question: Should the U.S. Congress pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act to raise the minimum wage and index it to the cost of living? Create a hashtag that you think could go viral and bring attention to your position on the issue.
The Minimum Wage: Selected Resources

Sources


Hicks, Michael J., “Who Lost Jobs When the Minimum Wage Rose?” Policy Brief (Fort Wayne, IN: Ball State University Center for Business and Economics Research, 2010), http://cms.bsu.edu//media/WWW/DepartmentalContent/MillerCollegeofBusiness/BBR/Publications/MinWage.pdf.


Court Cases
United States v. Darby Lumber Company, 312 U.S. 100 (1941).
West Coast Hotel Company v. Parrish, 300 U.S. 379 (1937).

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