

WHAT WILL BE THE FUTURE OF THE ARCTIC

(Thanks to Agathe Weber, International Polar Foundation, www.polarfoundation.org)



Lesson at a glance



Students participate in a role play exercise to begin to understand the complexity of the situation in the Arctic and the conflicts of interest between economic, environmental and social issues.

Time

Preparation time: 20 minutes to cut out position cards and print out additional online information

Class time: 60 minutes

Materials (per group of students)

- Position card
- Internet access for students to conduct further research OR print outs of the web-based material for each position to be handed out to students prior to the discussion

Activity Directions

1. Divide the students into four groups, with an equal number in each group and tell them they are going to participate in a forum of a group called the Arctic Council.

Set the background for the meeting by giving the students the following information:

Imagine that a high-level intergovernmental Forum (see 'additional resources' below) which addresses issues faced by the Arctic governments and the indigenous people of the Arctic is at the point of making a crucial decision on the future of a region of the Arctic: either to give permission for this region's resources to be exploited by private enterprise, or to make it a natural reserve. To help them make this decision, the Forum members have appointed a small interdisciplinary committee of experts (that's you!) to report to the Forum promoting one alternative or the other. The aim of your discussion is to present to the Forum the issues from the perspective of the 'expert' role you have been assigned in order to help them make a final decision on the future of this region of the Arctic.

Important: During this discussion you will have to play a role and adopt the position you are assigned, even though it may not correspond to your personal opinion.

2. Give each group a card that represents a particular position and ask the students to read and discuss the information on the card. You may wish to allow them extra time to do further research related to their roles.
3. When the discussion takes place, moderate the negotiations among the four groups.
4. After about 25 minutes of discussion, have each group make its closing arguments. The students then vote based on their own personal opinion as if they were a Forum member, rather than from the official position of the group they represented in the activity.
5. Summarise the main points brought up during the discussion and ask the students whether any compromises might have been possible (such as taxes for the benefit of NGOs, the establishment of wildlife or marine protected areas, etc.).

What will be the Future of the Arctic? Position Cards

You are a politician

You take a very serious view of the economic future of YOUR region, which borders the Arctic Ocean where your people depend on the land for food, economic support, and links to their traditional culture. New drilling and mining operations would create significant income that would be very lucrative for your country or region: the taxes paid by the oil companies alone would provide stable revenue for your country/region for at least 10 years, and you are looking for ways to encourage sustainable development that would decrease the environmental impact of such development.

Your opinion: In principle, you support mining and drilling activities in the region that are sustainable and that would benefit your region for the long term.

Your source of information for preparing your role: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/in-mackenzie-valley-frustration-and-a-sense-of-foreboding/article1269987/>

You are a researcher

From your research, you know that the environment in the Arctic is suffering enormously from the effects of climate change and pollution and that humans are the main culprits. In Alaska for example, the permafrost (the upper part of the ground that stays frozen solid all year round) is the basis of the local ecosystem, and it is thawing not only as the result of climate change, but also because of the infrastructure humans have built in the region.

Your opinion: You believe that making the Arctic a natural reserve would be the only reasonable thing to do.

Your source of information for preparing your role: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_arctic_feedbacks_report_exesum.pdf

You are the representative of a non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Through your work in the field you have seen firsthand the devastating impact that climate change and industrial pollution are having on the life of local communities and the fauna. In addition, new human infrastructures (roads and pipelines) are harming the ecosystem and preventing local communities from continuing to live in their traditional ways (for example, keeping herds of migrant livestock or hunting). Any new industrial operations are only going to make things more challenging for local communities and their environment.

Your opinion: In principle, you are very concerned with the negative consequences for the fauna and the local communities if this region is opened up to the major multinational corporations.

Your source of information for preparing your role: www.atkinsonfoundation.ca/files/Arctic_in_Peril.pdf

You are an economist

Through your job as a consultant in market economics, you have been able to see the initial effects of climate change in the country. For example, insurance companies have stopped providing coverage for houses in some areas with the permafrost thawing. However, you can also see the positive side of these changes: the more the ice melts, the more oil and mining companies can explore to find new places to drill or mine. Ships may soon be able to travel north of Alaska, which means that there will be ports to build, having a very positive effect on the local economy.

Your opinion: You are very much in favour of developing the resources in this region of the Arctic.

Your source of information for preparing your role: http://money.cnn.com/2008/07/18/news/economy/alaska_drilling/index.htm

Additional Resources

The 'high-level intergovernmental Forum' referred to in the discussion above could be based on the role of the 'Arctic Council' which is a high-level intergovernmental group established in 1996 to promote cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States when dealing with common Arctic issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection. At present, Arctic Council does not have the authority to make such decisions but the premise of the activity is to assume a timeframe in the future when they would have such authority.

If your class subject matter and timeframe permit, you could include in your lesson a preliminary discussion of the 'Arctic Council' and its current role(s). For more information about the Arctic Council, go to <http://www.arcticportal.org/> and click on the 'Arctic Council' tab at the top of the page.

Thanks to the International Polar Foundation for their contributions to Polar Week activities.



INTERNATIONAL
POLAR FOUNDATION

International Polar Year 2007-2008 www.ipy.org