The United States in Afghanistan

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It is essential for today’s youth to acquire a broad set of skills to be active participants in the democratic process, yet teachers are often challenged to find quality teaching materials to facilitate classroom dialogue focused around current global issues. So how can educators teach their students to engage in civic learning activities to develop effective skills for participation in the twenty-first century? As the geopolitical climate continues to shift to Asia now more than ever, there is a pressing need for our youth to work cooperatively with others, develop effective communication skills, and be accepting of multiple points of view to cultivate a democratic mindset. Teaching controversial issues, such as the role of the US in Afghanistan, human rights, or genocide, can present numerous challenges in the classroom. The Choices curriculum, published by the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, offers educators a practical approach to examine authentic current topics while promoting skills for classroom teachers to address with students; therefore, the “Scholars Online” link of the unit allows for online media to serve as an effective teaching tool when discussing issues of conflict, providing students with multiple perspectives of current issues.

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The most recent curriculum guide developed by Choices is titled The United States in Afghanistan. This resource offers a comprehensive look at a breadth of content focused on cultural demographics, pre-twentieth-century history, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Primary source documents are also a vital component of this resource. Students can engage in reading 1979 correspondences between Leonid Brezhnev and Jimmy Carter, in addition to memoirs written by native Afghans when the Taliban claimed rule in the mid-1990s. The Choices website also hosts a series of online video clips, titled “Scholars Online.” Professors from Brown, Georgetown, Dartmouth, and Williams answer important questions relating to US policy in Afghanistan today. These questions are often difficult for classroom teachers to address with students; therefore, the “Scholars Online” link of the unit allows for online media to serve as an effective teaching tool when discussing issues of conflict, providing students with multiple perspectives of current issues.

All of the Choices units facilitate the development of teaching deliberation skills to students. The United States in Afghanistan unit presents four options to students, who will be called upon to appear before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate and persuade members that their chosen option is the best policy to address the current role of the US in Afghanistan. The four options for this unit are “Fight and Defeat the Taliban,” “Target al-Qaeda,” “Promote Security by Supporting Democracy,” and “Withdraw Our Troops.” Students can actively participate in deliberation activities to share one point of view while being mindful and having a better understanding of the other three options as potential policies. This part of the curriculum is the most fundamental for students because it allows them to engage in authentic discourse focusing on realistic alternatives for promoting democratic values in our changing world. The Choices units engage students in genuine learning opportunities to help them actively participate in the democratic process.

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