

U.S. Policy in Central America

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Lesson 4: Should the U.S. Intervene? A Persuasive Essay

Time: 45-60 minutes

Background

After a series of interactive activities that allow students to construct new knowledge, it is important to assess what students have learned and give them an opportunity to practice the skills of the academic discipline they are studying.

The final assessment for this unit requires students to draw on the knowledge they've gained and to synthesize evidence from seven additional sources to evaluate the impact of U.S. policy in El Salvador during the civil war period. Students are given a prompt and a set of primary and secondary sources that they must draw upon to support their position.

This essay could be completed in class or out of class, depending how much time and support students need to be successful. The excerpted sources are short enough that students could read and annotate them for homework and then write the essay in one class period.

Purpose

- To develop a clear, arguable claim evaluating the U.S. role in Central America that can be supported with reasoning and evidence
- To synthesize information from a variety of primary and secondary sources to support a clear position on if and when the U.S. should intervene in other countries

Materials

- **Essay prompt and source packet**
- [Common Core Argumentative Writing Rubric Grades 11-12](#)

Instruction for Learning Activities

Distribute the prompt and source packet to students. Read the prompt aloud and then have students brainstorm a list of criteria that the U.S. should consider before deploying the military in

other countries (national security, shared values, economic self interest, protection of human rights, support for allies, expansion of territory, etc). As students read the source packet, they should look for evidence that supports the criteria they have identified as most important. Be sure to emphasize that the best responses will address possible counterarguments, so students should also include arguments and evidence for criteria they don't believe warrants military intervention.

If possible, use the argumentative writing rubric that the school regularly uses so that students are familiar with the expectations. Another rubric for argumentative essays included in the materials section (see above). Explain how to achieve mastery for each criteria as concretely as possible so that students are clear about how to be successful.

Individual teachers will have a better sense of what instructional activities and scaffolding materials would help students to demonstrate mastery on this assessment. Consider using one or more of the following instructional moves if students haven't mastered the skills to complete this task independently:

- Demonstrate how to use a document analysis form, such as this [example](#) from Facing History And Ourselves.
- Provide instructions for annotating primary and secondary sources to help students collect targeted information to support claims.
- Provide an outline template for students to use to plan their essay.
- Review a sample essay for a similar essay prompt and have students work in groups to score the essay with the rubric that the teacher has selected.