

Infrastructure Lesson Plan

TEACHER NOTE: to use this resource in your classroom - click 'file' and then click 'make a copy' to create your own Google Doc version to edit as needed and share with your students.

Introduction

During his 2018 State of the Union address, President Donald Trump called on “both parties to come together to give us the safe, fast, reliable, and modern infrastructure our economy needs and our people deserve.” Similar comments have continued to be echoed by other elected officials in recent years. For example, in speaking about the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, President Joe Biden stated that, “When we invest in infrastructure, we’re really investing in opportunity. These are investments that will build a better America. It sounds like hyperbole, but it’s real.”

But what infrastructure projects should be prioritized? Traditional infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and water lines? Or projects that focus more on the emerging technologies and communications systems, including developments in broadband access and alternative energy development.

This deliberation will challenge students to consider how the federal government should prioritize spending on infrastructure projects. Should the emphasis be on the revitalization of aging 20th century structures, or the investment in emerging 21st century initiatives?

Objectives and Outcomes

- Students will identify some of the major infrastructure spending projects of the 20th century, including utilities, highways and telecommunications.
- Students will gain an expanded understanding of the current political attitudes and the various viewpoints regarding infrastructure spending.
- Students will deliberate and assess the choices available regarding future federal infrastructure investments.

Lesson Plans

Pick and choose from the following strategies to engage your students in the issue.

1. **Warm-Up Activity.** Choose from one of the following strategies to activate prior knowledge and engage your students.
 - a. **A/B writing.** Write the following two statements on the board. Instruct students to choose the statement with which they most agree and then free write for two minutes explaining why they support that statement. Allow several students, at least one for each statement, to share their thinking with the class.
 - i. The government should prioritize 20th-century projects (roads, bridges, utilities, etc.) in their infrastructure spending.

- ii. The government should prioritize 21st-century projects (broadband, high-speed rail, cybersecurity, etc.) in their infrastructure spending.
 - b. **Think-Pair-Share.** Write the prompt on the board: “**How should the federal government spend its infrastructure dollars?**” Have students silently write down their thoughts and then discuss them with a partner. Give several pairs an opportunity to share their examples.
 - c. **Take a Stand.** Tell the students: “**We need to look toward the future. Infrastructure spending should prioritize 21st-century projects rather than 20th-century projects.**” Have students line up on a continuum based on their opinion from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Ask several students from different points on the line to share their reasoning and defend their position.
2. **Vocabulary Preview.** Before watching the videos, reading the background articles, and using the additional resources, have students define the terms on the [Vocabulary Preview Chart](#). This could be done as a jigsaw or individually, and depending on available time it may be completed for homework or in class.
 3. **Background Knowledge.** Have students read the [background articles](#), watch the [background videos](#), and complete the accompanying background questions. Depending on available time, this may be done in class or for homework. Additionally, students should look for references to the vocabulary terms, and write quotes of the terms being used on the Vocabulary Preview Chart.
 4. **Deliberate.** Have students watch the videos about infrastructure spending. While watching the videos, students should complete the [note-taking chart](#) for each side’s argument. Then, choose one of the activities from the [Deliberations website](#) to engage your students.
 5. **Assess.** In addition to engaging in the Deliberation activity above, you may choose to have students complete an independent assignment to assess their mastery of the topic.
 - a. Write a compare/contrast essay on the Works Projects Administration versus recent and current infrastructure plans, and the investment choices that are proposed.
 - b. Draft an actual budget breakdown of infrastructure spending and/or reach out to local representatives with a letter supporting your specific views on infrastructure spending.
 6. **Extension.**
 - a. **Civil Engineer/City Planner Guest Speaker:** Invite a local civil engineer or city planner to visit your classroom and provide students with a hands-on, insider view of infrastructure projects.
 - b. **City Council Guest Speaker:** Invite a local elected official to visit your classroom and discuss the process of working with the federal government on infrastructure projects.
 - c. **A Local Look:** Have your students evaluate the infrastructure in your community, identify spending priorities, and communicate those priorities to your elected officials.
 - d. **Committee Hearing Simulation:** With some students serving as members of Congress and some as testifying experts, have your class engage in a simulated Congressional committee hearing about infrastructure issues as if they are members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (They can assume the roles of actual committee members or choose states to represent).

- e. **Political Mash-Up:** Have students create and perform dialogues using excerpts from President Eisenhower's statements about the Federal Highway Act (available at [1955 Address](#) and [1958 Address](#)) and statements about infrastructure from current elected officials (which they should research).