

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.

Deliberation Topic: Should the United States Acquire Greenland?

Introduction

On March 4th, 2025, just several weeks after beginning his second term in office, President Donald Trump said the following while speaking during a joint session of Congress: “We need Greenland for national security and even international security. And we're working with everybody involved to try and get it. But we need it really for international world security. And I think we're going to get it. One way or the other, we're going to get it.”

The largest continent in the world and long inhabited by different Arctic peoples, Greenland was colonized by Denmark in 1721 (Visit Greenland). As far back as 1867, the United States has maintained an interest in what Greenland could offer to the country (HISTORY). During the World War II era, the United States defended the territory for the Danish government after Denmark fell to Nazi forces. Considering both national security and geopolitical interests, the Truman administration unsuccessfully sought to purchase the island in 1946 at the start of the Cold War. In the time since, the United States has maintained a military presence in Greenland and the Greenlandic people first achieved “home rule” status in 1979 (Visit Greenland).

Greenland matters in ensuring “American security,” as the island’s geographic location presents opportunities for American defenses for missiles, submarines, and other surveillance efforts (Danish Institute for International Studies). In tandem with its use of the Monroe Doctrine of American superiority in the Western Hemisphere, the Trump administration has renewed century-old interests in Greenland. The administration has not only sought Greenland for its strategic benefits, but also for the island’s availability of critical minerals.

However, opponents to President Trump’s call to acquire Greenland have raised concerns that such a move would alienate an ally in Denmark and complicate matters on the world stage, including within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Some opponents have explicitly argued that an American claim to Greenland would be equivalent to a Chinese claim to Taiwan and that such a move is unnecessary given the United States’ already-active military presence.

So what do you think? This deliberation presents eleven video clips, five articles, and numerous educational activities to guide students through a review of the debate over whether the United States should acquire Greenland. After a careful review of multiple perspectives, students will determine their answer to the question and be presented with several optional extensions to take an active role in the debate.

Lesson Handouts

- [Vocabulary Preview Handout](#)
 - [Background Reading Handout](#)
 - [Background Video Handout](#)
 - [Note-Taking Handout](#)
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Objectives and Outcomes

- Students will be able to describe key vocabulary terms and concepts associated with the debate surrounding whether the United States should acquire Greenland.
 - Students will be able to identify and explain aspects of the debate surrounding whether the United States should acquire Greenland, including those arguments related to national security, economic power, sovereignty, and international relations, among others.
 - Students will be able to evaluate arguments related to the debate surrounding whether the United States should acquire Greenland and formulate an opinion on this question.
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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. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the students: “**Should the United States exert control over other countries in the Western Hemisphere?**” Have students silently write down their thoughts and then discuss them with a partner. Give several pairs an opportunity to share their examples.
 - b. **Take a Stand.** Write the prompt on the board: “**The United States must do whatever it can to protect its national security, no matter the political or economic cost.**” 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.
 - c. **A/B/C Writing.** Write the following three 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. National security is ensured through military deterrence.
 - ii. National security is ensured through international collaboration.
 - iii. National security is ensured through technological and economic development.

2. **Vocabulary Preview.** Before reading the background articles, watching the videos, 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.
 - a. [Vocabulary Preview Handout](#) (Google Doc)
3. **Background Knowledge.** Have students read the background articles, watch the background videos, and complete the accompanying background questions and/or use the note-taking charts. 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.
 - a. [Background Reading Handout](#) (Google Doc)
 - i. [American Interest in Greenland](#) (Visit Greenland)
 - ii. [The history of US presence in Greenland](#) (Danish Institute for International Studies)
 - iii. [America's Long History of Trying to Acquire Greenland](#) (HISTORY)
 - b. [Background Video Handout](#) (Google Doc)
 - i. [Greenland During World War II](#) (6:16), Cornell University Postdoctoral Fellow Dawn Berry
 - ii. [Greenland and U.S. National Security](#) (5:46), Wilson Center Polar Institute Director Rebecca Pincus
 - iii. [Congressional War Powers and Greenland](#) (3:44), Author and Rochester Institute of Technology Professor Sarah Burns
4. **Deliberate.** Have students watch the videos and read the articles arguing whether the United States should acquire Greenland. While watching the videos and reading the articles, 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.
 - a. [Note-Taking Handout](#) (Google Doc)
 - i. **Position: Yes, the United States should acquire Greenland.**
 1. [Vice President JD Vance \(R\)](#) (5:59)
 2. [White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt \(R\)](#) (2:34)
 3. [Secretary of State Marco Rubio \(R\)](#) (1:24)
 4. [Speaker of the House Mike Johnson \(R-LA\)](#) (1:11)
 5. Article: [Miller: 'Nobody's going to fight the United States militarily' over Greenland](#) (The Hill)
 - ii. **Position: No, the United States should not acquire Greenland.**
 1. [Representative Ted Lieu \(D-CA\)](#) (0:42)
 2. [Senator Thom Tillis \(R-NC\)](#) (4:29)
 3. [Senator Andy Kim \(D-NJ\)](#) (4:29)
 4. [National Interest Editor-at-Large Steve Clemons](#) (1:30)

5. Article: [**Trump & Greenland: Is There Logic in the Chaos?**](#)
(The Arctic Institute)

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. Have students provide a written response to the following prompt:

i. Should the United States acquire Greenland?

b. Based on their research, have the students create a list of arguments for and against whether the United States should acquire Greenland. Students should rank these arguments from strongest/most convincing to weakest/least convincing. For the strongest and weakest arguments, students should explain why they feel this way.

6. **Extension.** Consider extending student learning by engaging your students in one or more of the following optional extensions.

a. **Letter to the Editor** - Write a letter to the editor that explains your opinion on whether the United States should acquire Greenland. Support your arguments with examples from the videos and articles. Submit your letter to a local newspaper or online publication.

b. **Contact Your Congressional Representative** - [**Research your members of Congress**](#) and write an email or letter voicing your opinion on whether the United States should acquire Greenland. Use [**the guide linked here**](#) to provide guidance on how to write this.

c. **Interview** - Find a local elected official, professor, or a current or former member of the United States' Armed Forces and interview them regarding their thoughts about whether the United States should acquire Greenland. Prepare a presentation to share your findings with your classmates.

d. **Create a Documentary** - Consider participating in C-SPAN's annual [**StudentCam documentary competition**](#) or a similar competition to develop a documentary highlighting whether you think the United States should acquire Greenland.

e. **Current Perspectives** - Explore [**the C-SPAN Video Library**](#) and see what politicians, experts, and others have recently said about whether the United States should acquire Greenland. Choose three perspectives and prepare a brief presentation comparing each of the three with a perspective included in the Deliberation.