

Issues Analysis Model

Issues analysis focuses on problematic questions that need to be addressed and answered but on which intelligent, well-informed people may disagree. In many cases, the disagreement leads to controversy and discussion marked by the voicing of opposing views. The questions may address problems of the past, present, or future. They may involve disagreement over facts, definitions, values, and beliefs. To say that questions are problematic means there are no conclusive, finally “right” answers. But some answers may be better or more valid than others, and may be rooted in a person’s cultural background, in formal knowledge and in “common sense” experience.

Teaching Students to Analyze Issues [Note: Not all steps apply to all issues]

1. When dealing with controversial subjects, keep an open mind so that you can encourage students to examine an array of ideas and develop the best ones. These ground rules may be used:
 - Everyone who has something to say will have an opportunity to say it.
 - Focus discussion on ideas, not personalities or people.
 - Anyone can change a position at any time. Remember, just because you choose one position at the start does not mean you have to stay with it.
 - The purpose of discussion is understanding, not winning or whining.
 - Define all terms.
 - Avoid unsupported and/or emotional statements.
 - Cite sources of information.
 - Do not interrupt others.
 - Listen to and respect the opinions of others.
2. When controversy appears, identify areas of agreement and disagreement and clearly describe the source of controversy. Recognize that consensus is probably not possible or desirable.
3. Respect the rights of students not to express their opinion on some issues.
4. Students should recognize that disagreements are simply that. They do not mean that someone is “stupid” or “wrong.”
5. Be sure that all sides of an issue are fairly and equally represented.

6. If you, as the teacher, express an opinion, do so at the end of the lesson, indicate that it is your opinion only, and explain why you hold that particular view. Do not expect students to change their views.
7. Be aware of local standards. Issues freely discussed in one community may not be suitable for discussion in another.

References:

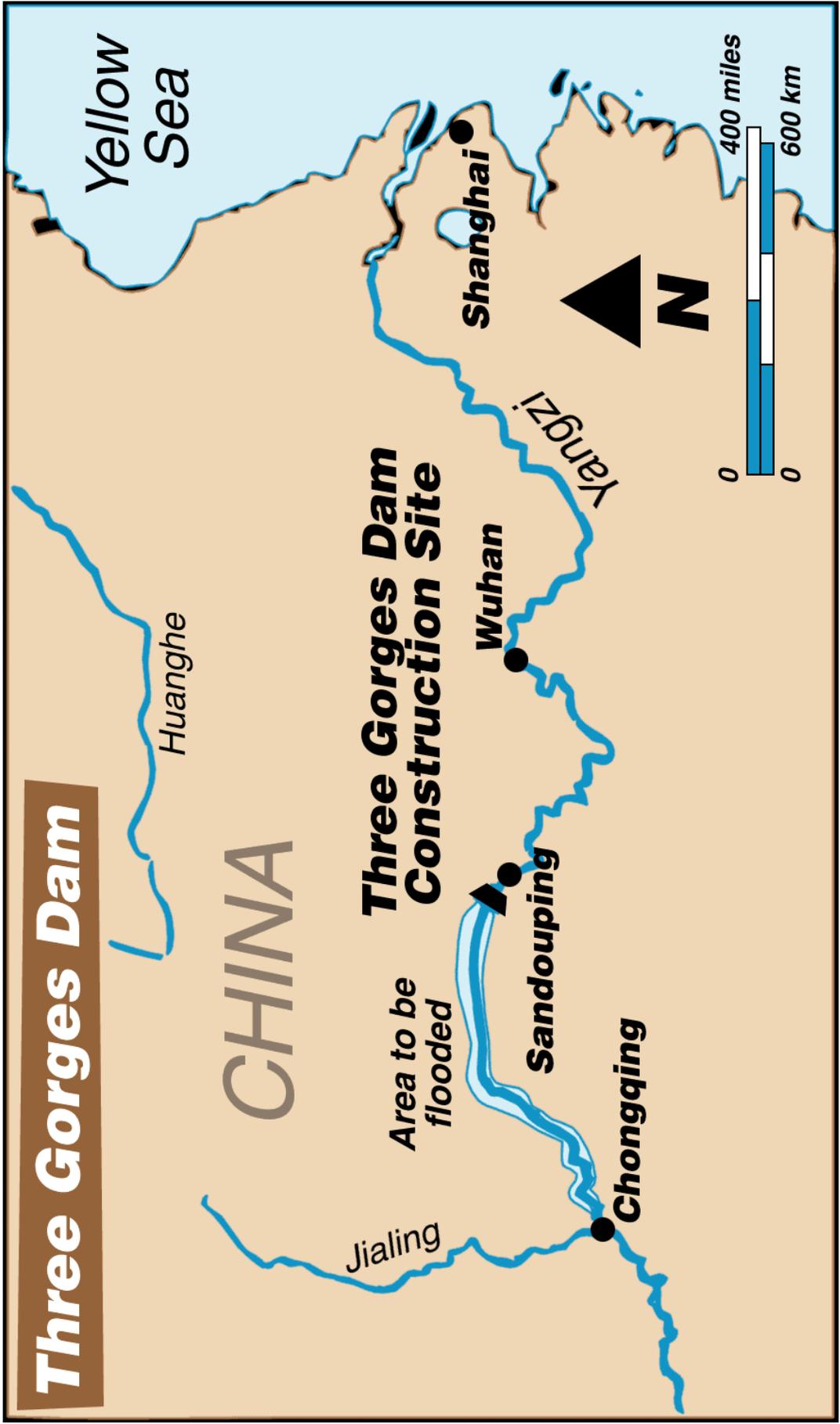
Evans, Ronald and Saxe, David Warren (1996). Handbook on Teaching Social Issues. Washington, DC: NCSS.

_____ (1995). Current Issues Teachers Guide. Alexandria, VA: Close Up Publishing

PROCEDURES FOR ANALYZING A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

1. Student groups of four are formed. Within each group, two teams, A and B, are selected.
2. The issue or problem is defined and the two positions identified. Team A is assigned to one position and Team B to the other.
3. Each team researches its position and states main ideas and details to support it.
4. At the direction of the teacher, teams assigned the same position can work together periodically to share information.
5. At the direction of the teacher and within each group, Team A presents its information to Team B. Team B then presents its information to Team A. Questions are asked and answered.
6. Each team switches viewpoints and summarizes the other team's position accurately and completely.
7. Each group of four uses a graphic organizer to complete a PRO/CON analysis and to reach a decision. Each member of the group must be able to state the group's decision and support for it.
8. Each student completes a written evaluation stating his/her position and clearly explaining each reason given to justify that position.

Three Gorges Dam



The Three Gorges Dam Project

The construction of the Three Gorges Dam officially began with the first pouring of concrete in December, 1994. Scheduled for completion in the year 2009, it will be the largest dam in the world. The Three Gorges Dam will span the third longest river in the world, the Chang Jiang, also known as the Chang, Yangtze, Yangzi, “Long River,” “Great River,” or simply “The River.” The watershed of the Chang is over 700,000 square miles, a fifth of China’s total land area. It is nearly 4000 miles long, making it China’s longest river. The Chang’s headwaters are found in the mountains near Tibet. From there, it flows southeast to the province of Yunnan, where it hits a mountain and makes a sharp turn north toward central China and the Three Gorges area (see map). The Chang divides China into a northern wheat growing region and a southern region where rice is the major crop. It provides an important water source for the 380 million people—a third of China’s population—that live along its banks.

What is the Three Gorges Dam project? It will be the world’s biggest hydropower plant, designed to meet a growing demand for clean electricity, boost the region’s economy, control the river’s floods and allow ships to travel on the upper parts of the river. It is designed to generate over 18.2 million kilowatts of electricity, about 1/7 of China’s total for a year and an output equal to that of 18 nuclear power plants. As reported by ABC News in late 1997, “Everything about the dam is big, from the 77-ton dump trucks already at work, to its official \$24.5 billion price tag.” The dam will create a reservoir of water nearly 400 miles long, about the length of Lake Superior, putting 150,000 acres under water, including 1500 factories and 16 important archeological sites.

The dam is viewed as a powerful symbol of a new, prosperous China. With the country now depending on coal to generate electricity, air quality over cities and in some rural areas is terrible. The cleaner hydroelectric power of the dam is expected to reduce dangerous air pollution and the high number of deaths from upper respiratory (breathing) problems. The Chang carries 78% of China’s river traffic, making the river important for the movement of goods. The reservoir created by the dam means that larger ships can travel 1500 miles further, including tankers, trading ships, and tourist boats, increasing shipping fivefold and reducing costs by about 35%.

One of the main purposes of the dam is to control flooding along the lower portions of the river. There have been over 300,000 lives lost to flooding of the Chang this century. This loss of life is expected to end, and as a bonus, there will be more water for irrigation. In addition, the dam will involve contractors and companies from both China and other nations—Caterpillar, General Electric, Mitsubishi, and Toshiba among others—that will help China become part of the world’s economy.

To protect the environment in the Three Gorges area, China will close down all small paper mills in the upper part of the Chang and build over a dozen waste water treatment plants in the reservoir area. The target is for all industrial waste water to be cleaned and all city sewage gathered for treatment by the time the project is completed. Controls on pollution will be tightened and forests planted to reduce soil erosion. Tough measures are being adopted, as well, to stop ships from littering and polluting the river.

Jiang Zemin, the Chinese president, has said that the project will help bring the "... age old dream of the Chinese people to develop and utilize the resources of the Three Gorges section.." of the river closer to being true.

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Since the project’s start, the Chinese government and state media have reported only the rosy side of the Three Gorges Dam project, presenting it as a powerful symbol of a new and prosperous China. For example, the official cost is estimated at about \$25 billion US dollars, but some say the real figure is more like \$32 billion. The human cost is even greater. The dam is forcing the move of more than a million people living along the river. Disease, poverty, and a poorer quality of life could affect those who are forced to move. More than 320 villages and 140 towns will be underwater. Some of the most precious artifacts and hundreds of priceless archeological sites of China’s long civilization will be lost. Nearly 1600 industries, power transmission and communication facilities, harbors, smaller power plants, roads, and pumping stations will also be affected. Right now, 80% of China’s cities have no sewage treatment, and there are no plans for any in the new cities being built to house those being moved.

Chinese scientists, engineers, and politicians who are against the project claim their voices have been silenced and that planners of the dam have covered up unfavorable information to make money and to gain power by building the biggest dam ever. They say

that much of the technology being used to build the dam is new and no one knows if it will work. They say that a great deal of pollution now trapped on land will wind up in the water and that species of birds and fish may be harmed. Some scientists worry about whether the dam will be safe from rock slides and earthquakes. Others claim that flooding will be even worse in some areas and that China would make better use of the billions of dollars by repairing the dikes and dams built in the 1950s .and 1960s.

A Chinese journalists, Dai Qing says that: “ There is no need to build this expensive, environmentally disastrous, and culturally destructive dam. If the real issues of the Three Gorges Dam could be discussed openly and truthfully then people would realize that it cannot solve China’s flood problem.”

ISSUE ANALYSIS/DECISION MAKING GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

ISSUE	
PROS (+)	CONS (-)
GROUP'S DECISION:	
SUPPORT FOR DECISION:	

Inquiry Questions:

What is the Three Gorges Dam Project?

Should the Three Gorges Dam Project be completed?

Rules for Discussing Controversial Issues

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Focus discussion on ideas, not personalities or people.

Anyone can change a position at any time.

Remember, just because you choose one position at the start does not mean you have to stay with it.

The purpose of discussion is understanding, not winning or whining.

Define all terms.

Avoid unsupported and/or emotional statements.

Cite sources of information.

Do not interrupt others.

Listen to and respect the opinions of others.

Internet Sites:

<http://www.im.org/programs/threeg> —the International Rivers Network, an environmental group that opposes construction, offers articles.

<http://www.nextcity.com/main/article/pi2/98-03-13-ips.htm> —an article, “China: Silence on Three Gorges Dam Grows Deeper,” IPS, March 13, 1998.

<http://www.prchina.net/Press/gorges.htm> —will lead to many articles, including “Chronology of the Three Gorges Project,” “Some Facts About The Three Gorges