



## **LESSON PLAN: *Debate with a Twist: A Town Hall Look at Immigrant Labor and Public Policy***

### **THE FILM**

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with viewing the film "Farmingville", a 78-minute long documentary about what happened when the 2001 hate-based attempted murders of two Mexican day laborers, in Long Island, NY, catapulted the town of Farmingville into national headlines. Prospects for working with area contractors and landscapers had attracted more than 1500 day laborers to this small town, making suburban Farmingville a surprised and reluctant outpost on the new front line in U.S. / Mexican border wars.

The film blends the stories of town leaders, residents, day laborers and activists on all sides of the debate. For nearly a year, filmmakers Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini lived and worked in Farmingville in order to capture the turmoil. Their film offers a "case study" of how a community in crisis dealt with its challenges and divisions. As such, it offers educators an excellent tool to help students explore political decisions in all their complexities, not just as a simplistic two-sided debate. The film also provides an opportunity for students to dissect how conflicts occur and to explore how to diffuse them without making neighbors into enemies or escalating rhetoric into violence.

The central issue in "Farmingville" – whether or not to build a hiring hall for day laborers – also touches on several important content areas, including how U.S. laws and infrastructure are at odds with an increasingly globalized economy, what it means to identify as "American", how class privilege and race intersect, and how racism can escalate from rhetoric to violence (including an attack on day laborers committed by local high school students).

### **OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson students will:

- Become familiar with the process of civic dialogue and its relationship to setting public policy
- Practice listening, speaking, writing, research, and critical thinking skills
- Examine the role of day laborers in the economy of U.S. towns and cities
- Examine issues facing and raised by current immigrants to the U.S. (primarily from Mexico)
- Practice civic conflict resolution

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9-12

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Civics / Government, American Studies, Anti-bias Education, Conflict Resolution, Economics, Language Arts, Latino / Hispanic Studies, Multicultural Education, Social Studies, Sociology

**MATERIALS:**

- VHS or DVD copy of "Farmingville"
- Monitor & VHS or DVD player
- Copies of Debate Score Sheet for each student
- Internet access for student research

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:**

Four to six class periods plus debate research & preparation time.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Direct your students to the special feature, Wave of Immigration, in the "Farmingville" companion site at [www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special\\_wave](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special_wave), which contains historical background information on the film's topics.

**ACTIVITY****STEP 1: *View and generally discuss the film, "Farmingville"***

To view the film in its entirety will take two 40-minute class periods.

**STEP 2: *Divide Students into five groups as follows***

1. In favor of solving Farmingville's problems by using county and municipal tax dollars to pay for construction and operation of a hiring hall.
2. In favor of solving Farmingville's problems by assessing a special tax on landscapers and contractors to pay for construction and operation of a hiring hall.
3. In favor of petitioning the federal government to arrest the undocumented workers and, in the interim, using all legal forms of intimidation and harassment to get the laborers to leave Farmingville.
4. In favor of organizing private and government efforts through churches, synagogues, civic groups, and social service providers to welcome the day laborers, get to know them as individuals, and offer English classes and other services that would help the day laborers become part of the community of Farmingville.
5. Debate judges

Each group should be no larger than 3 students, except for the Judges group, which can be as large as you need. In addition, if after viewing "Farmingville," students wish to advocate for options not listed here, or if they wish to alter these alternatives, they should be encouraged to do so.

**STEP 3: *Prepare for debate (outside of class)***

Assign each team to prepare a ten-minute persuasive presentation explaining their viewpoint and position. Each team should also be given a copy of the Debate Scoring Sheet so they know the criteria on which they will be judged.

Judges should also be asked to prepare by doing general background research. Because they will have to explain their scoring, which includes listening for facts and factual errors, judges, too will have to be familiar with the issues.

One good starting place for research is the website for "Farmingville": [www.pbs.org/pov/farmingville](http://www.pbs.org/pov/farmingville). The website includes background information and links to several organizations and agencies that deal with issues related to immigration, economics, and public

policy. It also includes a transcript of the film, so students can review various arguments made by people in Farmingville.

**STEP 4: Give each team 10 minutes to present their argument to the judges.**

Optional: Before the next class, let teams meet and prepare a 5 minute counterargument and a maximum of one question for each of the opposing teams.

**STEP 5: Optional: Allow teams to present their counterarguments and ask and answer one another's questions.**

Emphasize decorum and the fact that it is possible to engage in dialogue and debate without yelling or being disrespectful to an opponent.

**STEP 6: Have judges tally their score sheets and declare a winner.**

As part of the declaration, judges should be asked to explain their scoring. What was convincing?

**STEP 7: Debrief discussion**

In addition to discussing the issues surrounding the construction of a hiring hall, U.S. immigration policy, and the role of cheap immigrant labor in the economy, ask students to carefully examine the process of coming to a decision. Why does the Debate Scoring Sheet weight facts more than emotions? Why does it give points for emotional appeal at all? Why does it take away points for factual errors, but not for statements that mislead? How was this process similar to and different from typical political decision-making? Why were there more than two-sides to the debate? If there are typically more than two sides to an issue, why do we construct our political system as a two party system? Why do most media debates include only two sides?

Optional: Conduct a class-wide vote on how to resolve the conflicts between day laborers and other Farmingville residents, letting everyone vote their consciences and not necessarily their team assignment or voting for the best presentation. Discuss the results of that vote, especially if it differs from the debate outcome. Conduct the vote according to majority rules and note the outcome. Then see if the group can come to consensus. Ask students to identify what is similar and what is different in the two processes. Which do they prefer and why? Which seems more fair and why?

**ASSESSMENT**

As an assessment, have all students use the Debate Scoring Sheet to assess any piece of persuasive media.



## **EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS**

- Closely examine the various steps taken by the residents of Farmingville. Which escalated the conflict and how? Which de-escalated the conflict and how? How might people have approached things differently in order to resolve the conflict?
- One of the women in the film says, “I’m scared to death of the trickle down of intolerance to our kids, and it’s happening.” Discuss what spurs people to cross the line from words, feelings or beliefs to violence. Was the arrest of four Sachem High School students for arson and hate crimes a predictable outcome? What was the primary cause of the violence, the presence of the day laborers, community reaction to the presence of the day laborers, or something else? Were there things that people in Farmingville could have done to avoid the escalation to violence? Is there a strict line between “verbal violence” and “physical violence?” What kinds of verbal and physical violence have you witnessed in your community? Are they linked, and if so, how?
- Investigate the situation of day laborers in your community. What kinds of jobs do they hold? How much do they typically earn? Are they American-born or immigrants? If they are immigrants, are they documented or undocumented? Are they treated fairly? In what ways are their contributions to your community positive and in what ways are they challenging?

## **RESOURCES**

See [www.pbs.org/pov/farmingville](http://www.pbs.org/pov/farmingville) for links to relevant resources and background information.

## **STANDARDS**

**Level IV Grade : 9-12**

### **Language Arts - Writing**

- Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
- Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

### **Language Arts - Listening and Speaking**

- Standard 8: Using listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

### **Reading**

- Standard 7.7 Uses a variety of criteria to evaluate the clarity and accuracy of information (e.g., author's bias, use of persuasive strategies, consistency, clarity of purpose, effectiveness of organizational pattern, logic of arguments, reasoning, expertise of author, propaganda techniques, authenticity, appeal to friendly or hostile audience, faulty modes of persuasion)

### **Economics**

- Standard 5: Understands unemployment, income, and income distribution in a market economy

## **Civics**

- Standard 15: Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power
- Standard 16: Understands the major responsibilities of the national government for domestic and foreign policy, and understands how government is financed through taxation
- Standard 17: Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government
- Standard 18: Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights
- Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media
- Standard 20: Understands the roles of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics
- Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy
- Standard 24: Understands the meaning of citizenship in the United States, and knows the requirements for citizenship and naturalization
- Standard 25: Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights
- Standard 26: Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights
- Standard 27: Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities
- Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals
- Standard 29: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy

## **Working With Others**

- Standard 1: Contributes to the overall efforts of a group
- Standard 2: Uses conflict-resolution techniques
- Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills