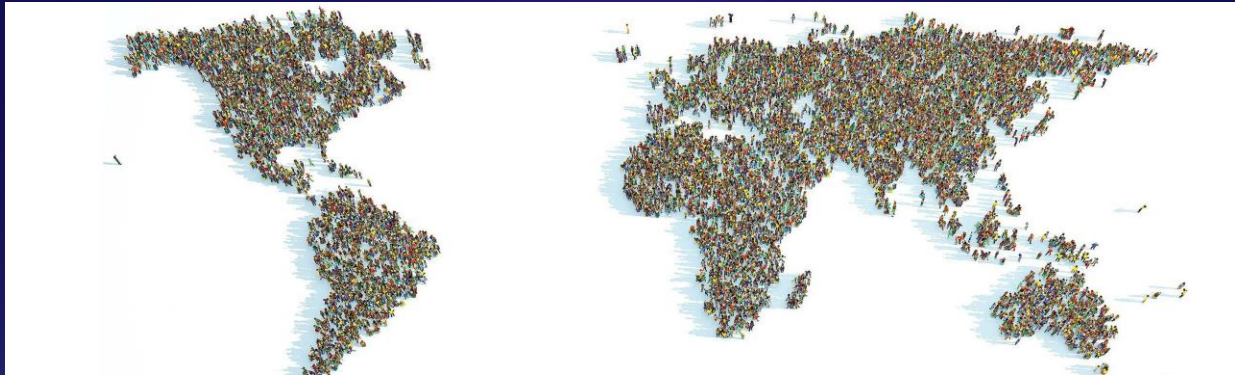




SPHERE EDUCATION
INITIATIVES

Advancing Student Civil Discourse and Civic Action on Complex Economic Issues



Presenter: Sarah Lane



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EPISODE

How Does A.I. Affect Education? (27:54)



Featured Speakers



**Jennifer
Huddleston**

Technology Policy
Research Fellow, Cato
Institute
[@jrhuddles](#)



**Nicol Turner
Lee**

Director, Center for
Technology
Innovation, Brookings
Institution
[@drturnerlee](#)



Mark Meador

Partner, Kressin
Meador, Visiting
Fellow in Technology,
Heritage Foundation
[@mrmeador](#)

Foundations: [Project Sphere](#)

Our Nonpartisan Mission



Lowering polarization by bringing *civil discourse* to every classroom, including on our most pressing and **difficult issues**

Supporting grades 5–12 educators and administrators

- Classroom resources: experience, resources, exercises
- Professional development and programming

Rekindling the Foundation of Civic Culture in America

What challenges do you face when
engaging students in complex
and/or polarizing conversations?

Zoom Poll 2 – You can expand on your response in the chat



By the Numbers

11 years old

Evidence of polarization

Iyengar & Tyler (2021), Stanford University

60%

of students believe people should not be allowed to speak if others may find the speech offensive

40%

of Students

30%

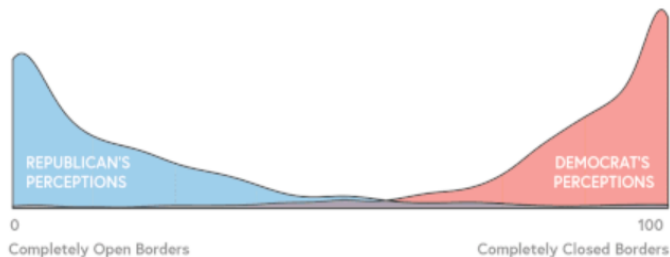
of Teachers

believe that government should be able to censor news publications and social media posts

The Knight Foundation

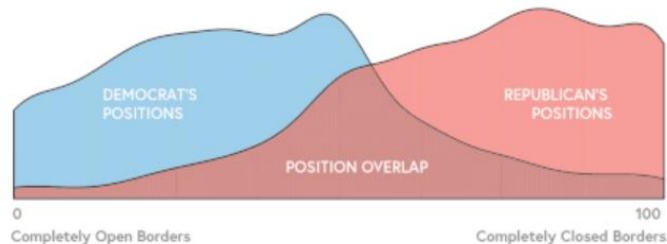
Our perceptions of how far apart we are on major issues is widely inaccurate, and largely consistent with where we were 30 years ago.

how far apart we *believe* we are



IMMIGRATION POSITIONS

how far apart we *actually* are



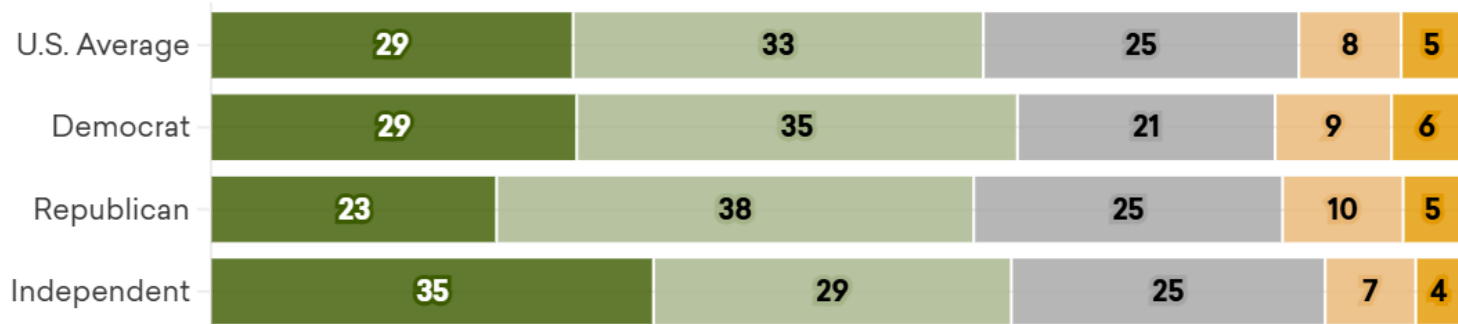
IMMIGRATION POSITIONS

Two in three Americans believe that politicians from both parties are more focused on their own economic interests

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

When it comes to economic issues, politicians from both parties are more focused on their own interests than on those of people like me.

● Strongly agree ● Somewhat agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Somewhat disagree
● Strongly disagree



Source: More in Common • N=2,637; February 21-27, 2025

Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than one-hundred percent due to rounding.



Defining Civil Discourse

What is it, and how is it connected to civic engagement and teaching econ?



Curriculum & Content

Introduce economic concepts through real-world case studies

Inquiry & Research

- Investigate how economic issues impact communities and policy

Civil Discourse

- Facilitate discourse that deepens understanding and considers multiple perspectives

Civic Action

- Propose solutions or advocacy efforts rooted in their economic analysis



Principles
of Civil
Discourse
Primer



Civil Discourse

As defined by the National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona, *civil discourse* is...

*“robust, honest, frank, and
constructive dialogue and
deliberation
that seeks to advance the public
interest.”*



Implementing Civil Discourse Practices in Econ

Healthy Discourse Norms

#Talk More

Actively listen • Stay on topic

Build on each other's ideas • Don't interrupt

Disagree respectfully • Encourage everyone to speak

Explain your thinking with reasons and evidence

**EVERYBODY CONTRIBUTES.
THIS IS A SAFE SPACE**

We strengthen each other when we solve problems together. Listen to understand.

Respond to connect and share.



CLASSROOM SCAFFOLDS TO SUPPORT HEALTHY SOCIAL DISCOURSE

TALK MORE IN CLASS

Try these sentence starters...

BETTY NORDENGREN

CONNECTING & BUILDING

I want to add to that idea... ..

This reminds me of because

Building on that, I would like to say,

I hear you say and I think

I think and I my evidence is

DISAGREEING & CHALLENGING

I disagree, because

I am not sure I think that. What is your evidence?

I think differently, because

I understand what you are saying, but I think

Could you tell me more about that? I want to understand your ideas.

AGREEING & SUPPORTING

I agree with because

I like what you said, because

I also feel that way, because

I like the way you said that, because

ENCOURAGING & INCLUDING

What can you add to the conversation,

Your voice needs to be heard too,

I am really impressed with your words, because

..... What do you think about it?





Assert

- Intellectual Honesty
- Credible facts
- Find potential agreements



Wonder

- Curiosity
- Learn about others' backgrounds and experiences
- "Tell me more"



Accept

- Viewpoints may or may not change
- Disagreement is a part of civil discourse
- Understanding is the goal



Respect

- No stereotypes, name-calling, belittling, or bias
- Dignity of each person



Establish

- Desired outcomes
- Goal-oriented
- Be proactive and responsive

Why does it matter what other people may think or believe?

- Guide towards understanding viewpoint diversity
- Emphasis on respect for the dignity of individuals

Helps students understand how different values and experiences shape economic decisions and trade-offs in policy and everyday life.





SPHERE

Fostering Civil Discourse and Diverse
Viewpoints for Every Classroom

Develop “critical curiosity.”

What should we do?

Who should decide?

What other ideas exist?

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Would you rather ...



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Would you rather...

Get \$10 a day a for a year?



Or get the full \$3650 all at once at the end of the year?





SPHERE

Who should decide?

FOUR CORNERS

- a. Me
- b. Parents and Guardians
- c. School or Local government
- d. State/Federal government



SPHERE

Who should decide how . . .

- Tax revenue is used
- Small businesses are supported
- Tariffs are implemented (and which ones)
- Jobs are increased in rural areas
- Schools are funded
- Housing is made more affordable or accessible

11 Civil Discourse Strategies to Try in Your Classroom

What strategies do you use, and what would you like to try?

Sentence Frames and Stems

Turn and Talk

Think-Pair-Share

Opinion Lineup

Four Corners

Fishbowl

Gallery Walk

Philosophical Chairs

Structured Academic

Controversy

Socratic Seminars

Big Paper Discussion



Focusing on a Current
Complex Issue:

Globalization and the
Intersection of Politics
and Trade Policy

Zoom Poll 2 – You can expand on your response in the chat

How do we engage and challenge learners to:

1. Grapple with foundational **economic concepts**
2. Understand and articulate how those concepts are impacted by the **intersection of politics and trade policy**

- Protectionism
- Tariffs
- Globalization
- Trade Barriers
- Interdependence
- Subsidies
- Comparative advantage
- Opportunity cost

Prompting students:

What is *protectionism* and what has spurred protectionist policies in the past?



Conell University Library



BBC

Why protectionism now?
 What are the intended benefits and what might be the unintended consequences?

Have students:

- Brainstorm *intended* benefits and consequences of each.
- Discover policy goals and their impacts on the economy, cultures, global peace, and national security

Protectionism Intended Benefits

- Bring business home/protect jobs
- Spur domestic spending and industrial manufacturing
- Raise government revenue
- Protect national defense industries



Globalization Intended Benefits

- Maximize comparative advantage
- Promote innovation
- Increase global quality of life and prosperity
- Freedom to move, trade, and experience diverse culture

Consequences of each?

Sphere's Globalization Module

MODULE

Globalization

Globalization has been evolving and connecting societies for centuries, but it has faced renewed attention, particularly in relation to trade and tariff policies. Introduce material from this suite of resources to students in your 9-12th grade classroom to identify, analyze, and evaluate the impacts of globalization on society and progress.

SHARE



Units

Globalization through the Land of "Spheradell"

Explore core economics concepts related to globalization through integrative projects in this lesson suite based on the simulated world, Spheradell. This unit is designed to be integrated into advanced placement economics classrooms.

Economics in the Age of Interconnection

Integrate these lessons highlighting economic concepts in your class to help students analyze and evaluate the underpinnings of decisions impacting policies around topics that influence current and future global integration. These lessons are designed for 9-12th grade history and economics classes.

Part 1 of the Collection

- Globalization and Comparative Advantage
- Comparative Advantage Readings and Exploration
- Barriers to Trade
- Subsidies and Tariffs
- Dynamic Relationship Between Trade and Politics
- Applications and Extensions

Part 2 features additional lessons to introduce globalization through entry point discussions and concepts

Welcome to the mythical land of *Spheradell!*

Discover how
**Comparative
Advantage**
both fuels and
grows with
Globalization



A Spheradell Sweet Treat needs a lot of ingredients...

When each country is producing its own resources . . . how can one be made?



Skybloom Flakes

Purple Elderbloom
Fruit

Yellow Copper
Cups

Red Wheat

Green Ovens

Simulation Round 2: Glintopolis

Friends of Glintopolis, it has come to the attention of my very observant mind that the citizens of Skydell Country are not producing their resources nearly as effectively as possible. According to my careful calculations, I believe that Skydell Country is withholding the production of the fruit of the elderbloom tree. As such, I have ordered that elderbloom trees be planted here in the glorious Glintopolis under our beautiful metallic dome. To make space for the trees, we will have to remove 10 of our special ovens. Fortunately, our good friends in Brindlebrook Country have graciously offered to purchase 5 of these ovens. The profit from the sale will fully fund the planting of the trees. Many of our great workers will have to retrain to shift from running machinery to picking elderbloom fruit. My momentous brain knows that with the greatness of the workers of our city and the generous nature of our Glintopolis citizens, we will soon outproduce Skydell Country in elderbloom fruit!!

—Strawkin

Lesson Overview

Student Objectives

- Define comparative advantage and interdependence.
- Explain how comparative advantage leads to international trade.
- Explain how interdependence creates efficiencies.

Grades 9-12
50 - 70 minutes

Vocabulary:

- Opportunity Cost
- Production Possibilities
- Comparative Advantage
- Interdependence

Activities:

- Simulate interdependence by creating Spheradell Sweet Treats
- Each of "Spheradell's" five sections will begin to produce two of the five products necessary to complete the task
- Each region will exchange needed goods and resources to meet needs
- Experience how comparative advantage leads to international trade

Lesson 5: Trade Protectionism and Politics

Example Questions:

- According to the cartoons, why might a government pass tariff policies?
- What are the intended and unintended consequences of tariff policies?



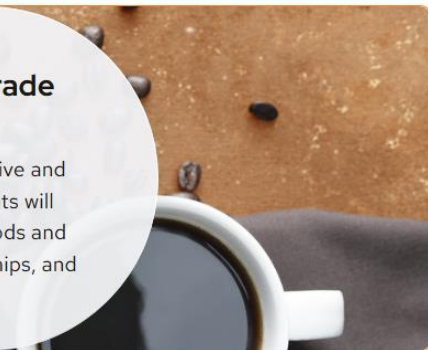
J. S. Pughe, "He Has One Medicine for All Ills," Keppler & Schwarzmann, April 14, 1897. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2012647664/.

Economics in the Age of Interconnection

LESSON

Strengths and Weaknesses in Global Trade Comparative and Absolute Advantage

This lesson explores the economic concepts of comparative and absolute advantage through real-world examples. Students will identify how countries specialize in producing certain goods and explain how this affects global trade, economic relationships, and resource consumption.



Activities:

- "The Life Cycle of a Cup of Coffee"
- Defining comparative and absolute advantage
- Commodities Research
- Socratic discussion

Coffee (example from class)

Which nations have the comparative and/or absolute advantage?

Equatorial countries such as Columbia, Ethiopia, Brazil, and Sumatra

How do factors of production influence the advantages?

Land: A hot, humid climate and long growing seasons give these nations an advantage.

Labor: People with fewer skills can learn how to harvest coffee easily, while others can specialize in the finer methods of grading the coffee, storing it, or shipping it.

Capital: These nations build mills and machinery for harvesting, drying, and packaging coffee beans for transport.

What would happen if a country lost its comparative advantage?

If other nations produced coffee beans, the amount of wealth generated from its production would drop in these producing nations.

How does trade benefit these countries?

These countries have a worldwide market to sell their goods, and other nations are able to access this relatively rare good. The good is in high demand, which can bring wealth to the producing nations.

Small group exploration:

- Electronics manufacturing (China, South Korea, Taiwan)
- Automobiles (Germany, Japan, United States)
- Textiles and apparel (Bangladesh, Vietnam, India)
- Oil and natural gas (Saudi Arabia, Russia, United States)
- Agricultural products (United States, Ukraine, Argentina)
- Pharmaceuticals (Switzerland, United States, Germany)
- Tourism (France, Thailand, Italy)

Video Library: Case Studies

Faces of Globalization Video Series



More Than Just a "Cheap T-Shirt": Guatemala Textiles



From Textile Town to Ghost Town to Car Town: West Point, Georgia



The Digital Gaming Economy – Faces of Globalization Gaming

Can lead to student-led action: What impact does trade have on your community? What action can you take?

<https://www.sphere-ed.org/module/globalization>

Trade & Tariffs: Taking Civic Action

Inquiry & Awareness

- Conduct an audit of the origins of a school supply (ex. school laptops)
- Explore benefits and consequences in the local community (ex. jobs, prices, supply chains)
 - Connect with a local business and do a deep dive case study

Create infographics, videos, or posters explaining trade concepts and effects in the community

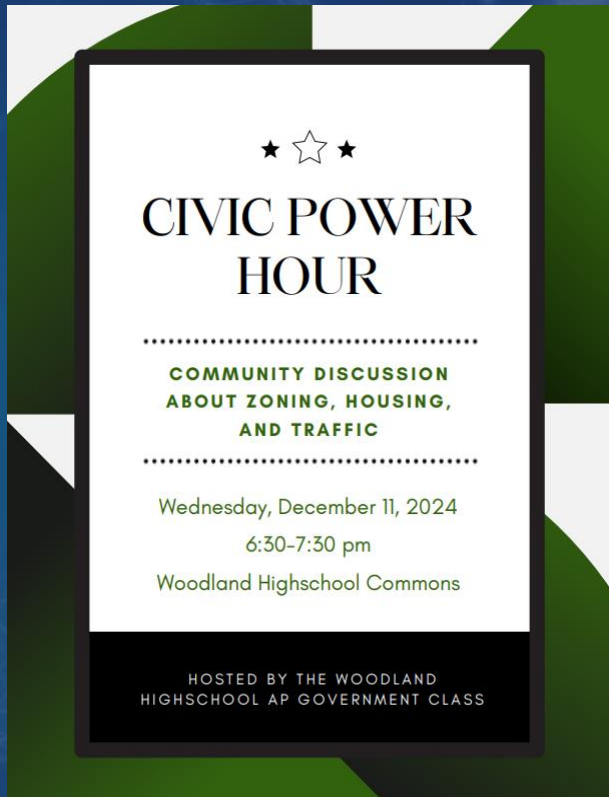


Globalization,
Unfolded |
Cato Institute

Trade & Tariffs: Taking Civic Action

Discourse & Deliberation

- Host debates or simulations (such as on WTO, trade negotiations)
- Organize a community forum or panel with local business owners, workers, or policymakers
- Present mock legislation or policy ideas
- Collaborate with other subject areas for persuasive writing or data storytelling

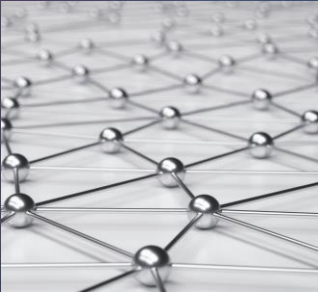


Trade & Tariffs: Taking Civic Action



Advocacy & Communication

- Write letters to the editor or emails to officials
- Create a blog post, podcast episode, or social media post to raise awareness and advocate for equitable trade policies



Connections outside of the School

- Partner with international classrooms to exchange perspectives on globalization
- Engage in joint inquiry projects across local regions or schools to explore shared economic concerns

Looking Ahead: Develop a guiding question to foster critical curiosity



1. Select a complex topic or standard.
2. Articulate a compelling essential question that spurs curiosity, critical thinking, and invites diverse points of view.
 - *Anticipate: hypotheticals & intervention points*
3. Share in chat / break outs

If time, share other next steps you are planning after today.



SPHERE EDUCATION
INITIATIVES

Closing Resources to
Support You



Featured News

New Globalization Lessons

Globalization has been evolving and connecting societies for centuries, but it has faced renewed attention, particularly in relation to trade and tariff policies. Introduce material from this suite of resources to students in your 9–12th grade classroom to identify, analyze, and evaluate the impacts of globalization on society and progress.

[Explore Sphere's Globalization Lessons →](#)

Sphere-ed.org



COLLECTION

Civil Discourse and Economics

This collection aims to cultivate critical thinking skills in students as they explore microeconomics and macroeconomics, examining the role of government in the economy through lessons that encourage analysis, evaluation, and understanding of economic principles and government interventions.

SHARE



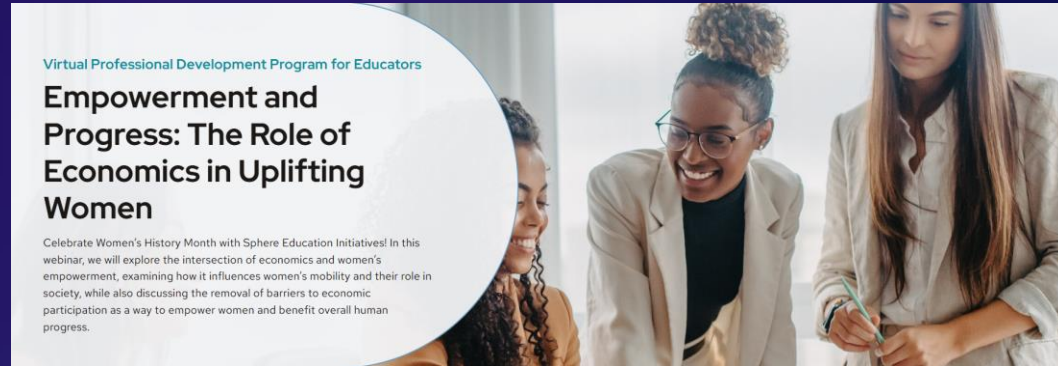
Economics lesson collections to foster civil discourse on:

- Economic concepts and policies that impact decision-making
- Exploring benefits and consequences of regulation
- Connecting students to the intersection of their lives with economics

Extensive Online Professional Development

- Live and recorded webinars
- Compelling issues
- Content releases
- Book launch events
- Film screenings

Search on our website for past and future programs.

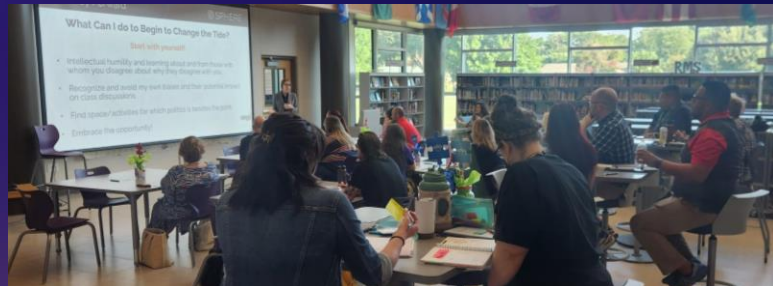


“Sphere on the Road”

Cost-free professional development

- In-person and/or virtual programs
- Flexible and collaborative planning
- Differentiated presentation models
- Pedagogy and Case studies
- Content breakouts

[Sphere-ed.org/sphere-road](https://sphere-ed.org/sphere-road)





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Washington, D.C. 2026

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