CLASSROOM LESSON: AMAZING ANIMATED FILM ON THE DEBT AND THE DEFICIT

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
This lesson fits in perfectly with units that address curriculum standards in economics, thinking and reasoning, business, technology, history, civics, government, mathematics and finance.

SAMPLE STANDARDS ALIGNMENTS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.MD.B.5.B Evaluate and compare strategies on the basis of expected values.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.ID.C.9 Distinguish between correlation and causation.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.RP.A.3 Use proportional relationships to solve multistep ratio and percent problems. Examples: simple interest, tax, markups and markdowns, gratuities and commissions, fees, percent increase and decrease, percent error.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem.
LESSON PREPARATION

- Prepare a monitor with Internet access to screen “Amazing Animated Film on the Debt and Deficit” at www.wetheeconomy.com/films (TRT 6:24)
- Prepare copies of Student Handouts for distribution (1 handout for each group of 4-5 students)
- Prepare whiteboard, blackboard or chart paper with the following words written on it: debt, deficit, taxes, surplus, budget.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Debt, deficit, surplus, taxation, economic stimulation, budget, debt ceiling, balanced budget, borrowing, GDP, Federal Reserve

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the difference between deficit and debt, and will be able to utilize both words in conversation and writing.
- Students will work in small groups to discuss, negotiate, and compromise on the allocation of a budget.
- Students will analyze the various costs and benefits of increasing and decreasing taxes to raise and lower the federal deficit.
- Students will consider various approaches to balancing a federal budget.
- Students will learn how animation can be used to represent larger ideas and issues.
- Students will consider how the national government’s economic decisions affect individual citizens.
- Students will learn how the current “budget crisis” is situated in its historical context.

REQUIREMENTS

MATERIALS

- Monitor/projector, and computer with Internet access
- Blackboard, whiteboard or chart paper
- Student Handout: Budget Makers

TIME:

- 1 class period

TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

Vocabulary building, large group discussion, small group work, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, cinematic analysis, weighing pros and cons, listening skills, creating solutions, considering abstract consequences, expository and responsive writing
PROCEDURES

1. Write the following words on a whiteboard, chalkboard or chart paper in front of the class:
   - Debt
   - Deficit
   - Taxes
   - Surplus
   - Budget

2. Spend 5-10 minutes discussing these terms and eliciting definitions and associations from the class. Draw connections between words as students provide definitions. If students are unable to offer accurate definitions, be prepared to provide your own definitions to the class.

3. Once each word has been covered thoroughly in the class discussion, instruct students to stop working and direct their attention to the monitor/screen. Play the film “Amazing Animated Film on the Debt and Deficit” (TRT 6:24).

4. Conduct a whole class discussion using the following questions as a guide:
   - What is the difference between the federal debt and deficit? How do both topics affect individual citizens? How do they affect you?
   - How does our current deficit and debt compare with deficits and debts of the past? What creates more or less of both?
   - Why might a government choose to spend more money than it has? When might this be a good idea?
   - How does taxation relate to the federal deficit and debt? Why would a government choose to raise or lower taxes?
   - What does it mean to stimulate the economy? How does government spending stimulate the economy?
   - When governments create budgets, they prioritize some aspects of their society over others. What types of trade-offs might they have to make?
   - How do bank interest rates relate to the federal debt and deficit? What happens when interest rates increase and decrease?
   - What is the long-term projection for the federal debt and deficit? How will this projection affect social programs, such as Medicare and Social Security?
   - Do you think a country carrying a debt or deficit is a bad thing? If so, how would you suggest that the government decrease either?
   - How does America’s deficit compare with that of other countries?
   - How did the film’s medium (animation) play a role in delivering its message?
PROCEDURES CONTINUED

5. After the film ends, divide the class into groups of 4-5 students each, and instruct students to sit together in their groups. Once students are sitting in their groups, give one copy of Student Handout: Budget Makers to each group. Instruct students to elect one “secretary” who will transcribe their ideas onto the handout and a “presenter” who will share the group’s answers with the class at the end of the activity.

6. Give students 15 minutes to complete the handout. While students are working in small groups, draw the large circle from the handout on the whiteboard, chalkboard, or on chart paper in the front of the room.

7. After 15 minutes have elapsed, reconvene as a whole class and allow time for the “presenter” from each group to share how they chose to allocate their budget to the different categories. As they share, ask students why they chose to make the decisions that they did. Chart their responses on the whiteboard, blackboard, or chart paper as each group presents.

8. Conduct a short whole-group discussion using some or all of the following questions as a guide:

   • What was the hardest part of this exercise? What was the easiest part?
   • Did anyone in your group want to create a deficit with their spending? What was the line item? How did the rest of the group react?
   • Did anyone in your group want to create a surplus? Why and how?
   • Did you have any major disagreements during your budget process? What were they?
   • What did your budgeting choices indicate about your priorities?
   • What would happen to a society if the spending for education were to be cut out? What about Medicare? What are the implications of extreme budget cuts in the real world?
   • On which did your group want to spend more money – military/defense, or Social Security? Why?

Note: It is important to try to elicit from the group the idea that budgets force choices based on needs and wants vs. revenue, and that every decision creates trade-offs and consequences based on which decisions are made.

9. For homework, ask students to write an expository essay (1-2 pages) that answers the following question: What are the advantages and disadvantages to having a federal deficit? What opportunities and limitations does it provide for an economy? Provide specific examples to support both sides of the argument – for and against the federal deficit. Then, explain which side you feel is more valid, and why. Note: Students may watch the film again at home by going to www.wetheeconomy.films/, and can incorporate data or information from other sources including films, books, articles, etc.
Congratulations! You have been put in charge of creating the U.S. national budget. Work together as a group to allocate the following categories as percentages of the total budget, and track those allocations in a pie chart, below. You may wish to exceed 100% and increase the national debt, or cut back on categories in order to pay down the deficit with the surplus.

- Food and Agriculture
- Transportation
- Science
- International Affairs
- Energy and Environment
- Social Security, Unemployment, & Labor
- Medicare & Health
- Housing & Community
- Government Costs
- Veterans Benefits
- Education
- Military