CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
This lesson fits in perfectly with units that address curriculum standards in language arts, social studies, civics, economics, thinking and reasoning, and media studies.

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.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

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.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.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

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.SL.11-12.1.C Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
LESSON PREPARATION

• Prepare a monitor with Internet access to screen “Your Tax Dollars At Work” (TRT 5:58).
• Prepare copies of Student Handouts for distribution.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Taxes, rebuttal, rounding, debate, government spending, subsidy, subsidized, optimal, middle income, social security, Medicaid, Medicare, consensus, pension

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

• Students will consider the pros, cons, and implications regarding allocation of tax dollars.
• Students will gain an understanding of the various categories of government spending.
• Students will develop their own opinions on how tax money should be spent, and arguments to support those opinions.
• Students will integrate information from a media source into their own thoughts and ideas.
• Students will analyze multiple perspectives on the pros and cons of the various categories of government spending.
• Students will communicate their opinions to the class, using information collected from the film.
• Students will discuss, negotiate, debate, and advocate for specific positions and ideas.

REQUIREMENTS

MATERIALS

• Whiteboard and markers, chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
• Monitor/projector, and computer with Internet access
• Student Handout: Government Spending Debate

TIME:

• 1 class period

TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

Vocabulary building, reading comprehension, large group discussion, small group work, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, supporting ideas with examples, comparing and contrasting information sources, public speaking, research skills, listening skills, expository and responsive writing
PROCEDURES

1. Write the following terms on the chalkboard, whiteboard, or on chart paper in the front of the room:
   - Education
   - Housing and Community
   - National Parks
   - Food and Agriculture
   - Energy and Environment
   - Science
   - Transportation
   - Foreign Aid
   - Prisons
   - Food Stamps
   - Interest on Debt
   - Federal Courts
   - Military/Defense/Veterans
   - Social Security
   - Medicaid/Medicare

2. Allow 5-10 minutes for students to list the top 5 areas where they think their tax dollars should go, in order from 1 being the most important to 5 being the least.

3. After students have completed the task, allow 5 minutes for a quick debrief on the exercise. Use some or all of the following questions as a guide:
   - Where did you choose to spend your tax dollars?
   - Why did you prioritize those areas over others?
   - Were there areas you wanted to include but couldn’t? Which ones were the hardest to let go?
   - Have you heard discussion about taxes on the news or at home? What have you heard?
   - What do you think the actual top 5 categories are when it comes to government spending? Why do you think this?
4. Explain to the students that they are going to view a film about the allocation of tax dollars. Direct their attention to the monitor or screen. Play “Your Tax Dollars at Work” (TRT 5:58).

5. After the film, conduct a whole group discussion using some or all of the following questions as a guide:

   • Where does the majority of our tax dollars go?
   • Were you surprised to learn that 70% of our tax dollars are spent in only 3 areas? Do you think those are the 3 most important areas?
   • Why does Mike Pesca say that the debate about spending on education is really a “rounding error”? What is the larger point he is trying to make?
   • Economist Adam Davidson says “Most of the debates about how government spends money is politicians finding a way to grab someone’s heart and make it seem as if some narrow thing that they care about is really what government spending means, either good or bad.” Explain what he means by this.
   • What is Pesca saying when he says that the public debate over government spending is really about “head vs. heart”?
   • What do you think an optimal use of government money would be?
   • Do you think Penn South is a valuable use of tax dollars? Explain.
   • Do you think social security is a valuable use of tax dollars? What about Medicare/ Medicaid? Explain.
   • The film mentions that military spending is one of the top categories in the federal budget, but does not explore this category more deeply. Why do you think this is the case?
   • Do you think that military spending is a valuable use of tax dollars? Explain.

6. Divide the class into 7 groups. Assign each group one of the following categories:

   • Military, Defense, and Veterans Services
   • Education
   • Housing
   • Science & Environment
   • Social Security
   • Medicare and Medicaid
   • Food, Agriculture, Food Stamps
7. Explain to the class that they will be participating in a debate about government spending, and that they will be asked to represent the interests of their assigned category. Then, based on the strength of their arguments, the class will try to create a budget based on consensus.

8. Distribute Student Handout: Government Spending Debate. Allow 5-10 minutes for groups to prepare a statement that explains why the government should spend tax dollars on their category. They should use the appropriate row on the handout to take notes as they prepare. Explain that they will be reading this statement to the class, and that there will be an opportunity for others to argue against it.

9. After the prep time has elapsed, reconvene as a large group. If possible, have students arrange themselves in a circle, facing each other.

10. One by one, call on each group to present their statement to the class. The rest of the class should take notes on their handouts as each group presents.

11. After each group presents, revisit each category. Ask students to decide how much of the budget should be allocated to this category, based on the small group’s presentation and their notes. Allow 2-3 minutes for cross-debate, and for students to share their notes. After 2-3 minutes, stop the discussion and ask for a percentage. Record the percentage on the chalkboard, whiteboard, or chart paper. Continue this way until all 7 categories are recorded on the board.

12. Create a pie chart with the percentages. Did the class create a balanced budget? Or is there a deficit or surplus? Allow time for students to adjust the numbers.

13. For homework, students should write a 1-2 page expository essay. They should reflect on the experience they had in class, trying to allocate funds across multiple categories, as well as the following question, which appears in the film:

“We obsess over things like welfare and foreign aid and solar panels, but almost all of it is social security, Medicare, defense – so what’s the right discussion to be having about the big things?”

-Mike Pesca, Your Tax Dollars at Work

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 today’s classwork, films, books, articles, etc.
**STUDENT HANDOUT**

**GOVERNMENT SPENDING DEBATE**

**Directions:** Use this chart to take notes as your group prepares a statement. Then, as your classmates present, write down responses, thoughts, and questions to use in your rebuttal and your homework assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY OF SPENDING</th>
<th>POSITIVES</th>
<th>NEGATIVES</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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<td>Military, Defense, &amp; Veterans Services</td>
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