

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

Overview: NewsHour Extra feature stories can help students identify and interpret key issues in current events. This activity anticipates one class period, but the follow-up essay might be assigned as homework or in another period.

Warm Up: Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

Main Activity: Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the questions on the reading comprehension handout.

Discussion: Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

Follow-up: Students can write a 500-word editorial on the topic expressing their views and send it to NewsHour Extra [extra@newshour.org] for possible publication.

Evaluation: Students are graded on their answers to reading comprehension questions and/or their editorial.

Story: Port Sale Sparks Political Battle, 02/22/06

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/jan-june06/ports_2-22.html

Initiating Questions:

1. Name a few big U.S. seaports.
2. Why are they a security risk?
3. What can the government do to make sure that terrorists don't transport a bomb into the United States?

Discussion Questions:

1. What happened recently that raised concerns about security at six major east coast seaports?

A British company, Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation, manages the day-to-day operation of seaports in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Miami and New Orleans.

Last week, Dubai Ports World, a state-run business in the oil-rich nation of United Arab Emirates, acquired the British firm in a \$6.8 billion deal.

The arrangement triggered protests from lawmakers in both parties who expressed concerns because at least two of the 9/11 hijackers came from the United Arab Emirates, and others used it as a financial base.

"The bottom line is very simple, and that is that this company is owned by a country in which there have been significant nexus with terrorists," said New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer.

2. What have lawmakers proposed to do to stop the Dubai Ports World deal?

Democratic Senators Bob Menendez of New Jersey and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York are sponsoring a bill that would block the sale of U.S. port operations to companies owned by foreign governments.

Among the lawmakers threatening to hold up the deal are members of the president's own Republican Party, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee, and House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois.

Hastert said he is "concerned about the national security implications that this could have for the safety of the American people."

And Frist said, "If the administration cannot delay the process, I plan on introducing legislation to ensure that the deal is placed on hold until this decision gets a more thorough review."

3. What has the Bush administration said about the deal?

President Bush defended the deal, telling reporters that he would veto any bill to block the agreement.

"I don't understand why it's OK for a British company to operate our ports but not a company from the Middle East when we've already determined security is not an issue," Mr. Bush told reporters after Frist's statement.

Lawmakers need to "step up and explain why a Middle Eastern company is held to a different standard," he said.

4. What has the response been from the United Arab Emirates?

Response in the United Arab Emirates has been angry.

"Islamophobia is rising and has become like an infectious disease that spreads ... in the West," wrote columnist Rashid Saleh al-Oraimy in the daily paper, Gulf News.

5. How much of what goes in and out of ports is checked?

The danger of terrorists shipping weapons in the millions of boxes traveling on boats to U.S. ports has long been an issue of concern for homeland security officials: currently only around 7 percent is checked by security.

6. What is the difference between what the government has spent on airline security and port security?

Since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the United States has spent \$18 billion to improve security at airports, but only \$560 million to help cities secure seaports, according to one congressional study.

7. What steps has the government taken to ensure security at U.S. ports?

But Homeland Security officials say they have increased the number of targeted spot checks at the nation's ports and deployed more sensors to detect chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the Dubai Ports World deal should go forward?
2. Do you think there is anti-Arab sentiment in the U.S. Congress? In your community? Why or why not?
3. Where is the United Arab Emirates? What is its history? What kind of relations does it have with the United States? List military, economic and cultural ties between the two countries and predict how this current controversy might affect them.