

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Free Trade Agreement is Key Issue for Ohio Voters, 03/03/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june08/nafta_3-03.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

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

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. 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.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Which countries are America's largest trading partners?**
- 2. Why would the government want to encourage trade with other countries?**
- 3. How might trade with other countries affect American companies?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

- 1. What topic are Democratic rivals Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama debating this week in Ohio?**

ANSWER

Democratic rivals Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama have accused each other of supporting the NAFTA trade agreement in an attempt to sway working-class voters in Ohio.

- 2. What is each candidate's position on NAFTA?**

ANSWER

Both candidates said they would renegotiate the free trade agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"I will say to Mexico that we will opt out of NAFTA unless we renegotiate it," said Clinton.

"We need to use the hammer of potential opt-out as leverage to get environmental and labor standards enforced," Obama said.

Obama also said, "I don't think NAFTA has been good for Americans, and I never have." He has accused Clinton not being consistent on trade.

"Senator Clinton also said I'm wrong to point out that she once supported NAFTA. But the fact is, she was saying great things about NAFTA until she started running for president," Obama said.

- 3. What is NAFTA? What impact has it had on the American economy as a whole?**

ANSWER

The North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, was a hot topic during the most recent debate between the two senators battling it out to become the Democratic Party's presidential nominee.

NAFTA was signed into law in 1994 during President Bill Clinton's first term in office. The law eliminates most tariffs -- or import taxes -- on goods and services bought or sold between the three countries: Mexico, Canada and the United States.

And while most economists believe NAFTA has been good for the American economy as a whole, it has hurt some industries and regions.

4. What impact has NAFTA had on Ohio's economy according to labor groups?

ANSWER

In Ohio, where many factories have closed and unemployment is high, labor groups say NAFTA sent U.S. jobs to foreign competitors.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the state has lost more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs since 2000.

Thea Lee, policy director of one of America's biggest unions, the AFL-CIO, says NAFTA resulted in poorer conditions for workers because company owners could threaten to move factories to Mexico if the union did not agree to lower wages and fewer health benefits.

5. What is an opposing viewpoint on NAFTA's impact on Ohio?

ANSWER

But not all economists blame NAFTA for Ohio's economy woes.

Ned Hill, economic development professor at Cleveland State University believes job losses were due to bad decisions by the three big American car makers: General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

"That is not due to NAFTA. That is because of the failed strategy of three companies," he told National Public Radio.

6. What is Senator John McCain's opinion of this debate?

ANSWER

Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain of Arizona said any attempt to renegotiate NAFTA could be seen by Canada as a betrayal and could impact its military support in Afghanistan.

"One of our greatest assets in Afghanistan are our Canadian friends. We need our Canadian friends, and we need their continued support in Afghanistan," McCain said at a town hall meeting in Round Rock, Texas.

The Democrats' plans to renegotiate would be a "betrayal of the long years of negotiations that we agreed to," he added.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think, is NAFTA a good thing or bad? Explain. Do you agree with Obama and Clinton or McCain and the president?

2. Do you think the candidates are just talking about NAFTA to get votes? What will happen after Tuesday's vote? How do the candidates balance campaigning in front of specific voters with specific concerns with crafting policies for a huge, very diverse nation?

3. Do more research on NAFTA. Which parts of the U.S. economy have benefited? Which parts of the U.S. economy have suffered? What impact have other trade agreements, including those made by the World Trade Organization, had on the U.S. economy?

4. According to many political analysts, Senator Hillary Clinton must win big in Ohio and Texas to have a chance of becoming the Democratic presidential nominee. What do you think? Must she win both states? Do you have a prediction about Tuesday's races?

5. Why is Ohio considered such an important state to win for the Democratic candidates? Look to some recent presidential elections in Ohio? How did the state vote? What does this tell us about the state?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.