

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

President Obama Encourages 'Civil Debate' on Abortion, 05/19/2009

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june09/abortion_05-19.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. Why is abortion such an inflammatory issue? Can you name other "hot button" issues?

2. What is the difference between being pro-life and anti-abortion? What is the difference between being pro-choice and pro-abortion?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What did President Obama speak about in his speech to graduating seniors from Notre Dame?

ANSWER

The president called for all sides in the abortion debate to treat each other with respect and search for common ground and work toward a world with fewer unexpected and unwanted pregnancies.

2. Who is Norman McCorvey?

ANSWER

Norma McCorvey was "Roe" in the landmark Supreme Court 1973 decision Roe v. Wade, the ruling that struck down state laws banning abortion. McCorvey is now a pro-life advocate.

3. Why did Notre Dame invite Mr. Obama?

ANSWER

According to tradition, Notre Dame University has invited every president since Eisenhower in the 1950s, and six have come and received honorary degrees at the Catholic university.

4. What is Roe v. Wade?

ANSWER

The court found that under the privacy clause of the 14th Amendment, women may terminate their pregnancy until the fetus becomes viable and could potentially live outside the womb.

5. Name two ways Mr. Obama has reversed Bush administration policies on stem cell research and abortion.

ANSWER

The president has eased restrictions on embryonic stem cell research and reversed a ban on funding international groups that perform or advocate abortions.

6. Why is the Catholic Church against abortion and stem cell research?

ANSWER

Official Catholic teaching says that abortion and the use of embryos for stem-cell research amount to the destruction of human life so morally wrong and should be banned.

7. What did the Gallup poll say about the number of people that identify as “pro-life”?

ANSWER

The Gallup poll shows that the number of Americans who identify as "pro-life" has increased, making it the first time since 1995, that more people identify as pro-life than pro-choice.

8. What did the data from the American National Election Studies say about opinions regarding abortion?

ANSWER

Their most recent findings state that 41 percent still believe abortion is a matter of personal choice and should be legal while only 15 percent believe abortion should never be permitted.

There is still 44 percent in the middle who may call themselves "pro-life" or "pro-choice" but who believe that abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you think Mr. Obama should have been invited to speak at Notre Dame? Why or why not? Should he have spoken about abortion?

2. Do you agree with the president that it is important to listen to people who do not agree with you and to find some common ground? Why or why not?

3. Gallup and American Election Studies have really different readings about public opinion on abortion in this country, why is this? Do you think this happens with other issues?

4. How do the different sides of the abortion debate use the words “pro” or “anti”, “choice” or “life” to depict themselves and the opposing viewpoints?

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.