

“CONFERENCE” ON GENERATING SOLUTIONS FOR RAIN FOREST DEFORESTATION

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Grade: This plan is best suited for upper-level high school students or upper-level, gifted junior high school students. It may be adapted accordingly.

Objective: This plan provides an interactive scenario in which students work with information about the current state of deforestation of rain forest regions in Latin America and then propose solutions to diminish the rate of deforestation. Students will benefit from working with one another in groups, assuming the “identity” of their assigned group, and engaging in formal classroom debate.

Requirements:

Information: The instructor may choose to either provide handouts to the students which contain background information (which would minimize the number of days scheduled to complete the assignment) or require the students to conduct research themselves to acquire background information (which would require more days to complete the assignment but would encourage students to use their research skills and determine what information they believe is important for the assignment).

Time: Depending on whether or not the students gather their own information, this assignment could take from approximately two to five days to complete.

Supplies: Each group will need one poster board or paper banner and markers or paint.

Resources: Teachers and students will need access to the Internet and/or good library facilities. The instructor’s most difficult task will be developing the proposals which the groups will debate. Draw upon information on the current state of the rain forest for developing these proposals and limit the number of proposals based upon not only the amount of information you are able to gather but also the amount of time you have to debate each one.

Outline: Students will be assigned to one of six groups: Cattle Ranchers, Government Leaders, Rubber Tappers, Settlers, Indigenous Peoples, and Environmental Actors. Ideally, only three students will be in each group, so some groups might be represented twice. Each group should understand background information on its origin, history, and contemporary goals in regards to deforestation and its relationship to the rain forest.

Students will be responsible for answering a series of questions about their group (which the instructor has developed), creating a small banner with a symbol which highlights their goal, identifying possible allies (both domestic and

international), responding to a series of proposals for dividing the rain forest into protected and non-protected areas (provided by the instructor), and writing a brief introduction to be read at the beginning of the "conference." Each group receives an equal number of claim markers, representing their claim to the entire rain forest.

Once the students have gathered the necessary background information to assume the identity and position of their assigned groups, the conference commences. In the opening of the conference, a spokesperson for each group will introduce the other students in the group, and state who the group believes is causing the problem of the rain forest (remember, each group will view the "problem" differently). After all groups have introduced themselves, the instructor presents the first proposal for dividing the rain forest. Each group will be allowed a turn to respond to the proposal, based upon its beliefs. After sufficient debate, allow the groups to vote on the proposal. Then continue on to the next proposals one by one, allowing the groups to debate the merits of each and vote.

To generate some sense of discord and reality, after each proposal has been voted on, "announce" a news flash which will cause one group to lose a certain number of its claim markers. The instructor should follow recent events in the region to help formulate the news flashes (for example, the recent out of control fires in the Brazilian Amazon which are destroying the homelands of indigenous peoples). After voting on each proposal, ascertain which one received the most favorable votes. Each group should then use its remaining claim markers to claim territory, according to the parameters of the selected proposal.

On the last day, give the students an essay assignment in which they must suggest a viable solution to the rain forest problem. The solution could be entirely different from those proposed by the instructor during the debate, a defense of one of the proposals that was debated, or an amalgamation of certain features from the different proposals. The essay should incorporate details from the conference and include an analysis of how the different groups would respond to the student's suggested solution.