

Interest Groups

Time Needed: One class period

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets
Scissors for matching activity

Copy Instructions:

Student packet (*5 pages double-sided; class set*)
Who's Interested? Activity (*class set*)
Overhead Transparency

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Identify three ways groups and organizations can influence the actions of government.
- Explain how individuals, public opinion, associations and groups form and carry out public policy.
- Describe the position of opposing groups on a public policy issue.

STEP BY STEP

- ❑ **ANTICIPATE** by asking students the following questions: Who decides what is offered in the school cafeteria? Are there any rules about what is served in the cafeteria? Who might care about what students eat every day? Why are they interested?
- ❑ **DISTRIBUTE** one reading and activity packet to each student.
- ❑ **READ** page one of the reading with the class, stopping to discuss both sides of the potato debate as needed.
- ❑ **ASK** students to think of one or two effects the regulation would create for each group and discuss responses with the class.
- ❑ **READ** the first two paragraphs and table on reading page two with the class.
- ❑ **DISPLAY** the transparency and read each organization's mission statement, pausing for the class to select which type of interest group would best describe each example. Follow up by asking where the Center of Science in the Public Interest and The National Potato Council would fit. (*Public Interest and Economic Interest, respectively*)
- ❑ **READ** through the rest of page two and have the students complete the activity on the bottom of the page and check for understanding.
- ❑ **LEAD** students through the steps of the *Potato Problem* activity page. Allow class time for students to complete all six steps (10-15 minutes).
- ❑ **READ** page three as a class, clarifying terms or ideas as needed.
- ❑ **DISTRIBUTE** *Who's Interested* to the class and review the instructions. Allow a few minutes for students to complete the matching, and check for correct answers. Ask the students to think about how these groups achieved these actions. (Gaining public support, lobbying representatives in government, and any combination of the inform/endorse/ donate/ influence activities.)
- ❑ **ASSIGN** the review worksheet.
- ❑ **CLOSE** by asking students to check their work on the review sheet with a partner. Answer any questions remaining.

Types of Interest Groups



The Humane Society works to reduce suffering and improve the lives of all animals by advocating for better laws; investigating animal cruelty; conducting campaigns to reform industries; providing animal rescue and emergency response; and caring for animals through our emergency shelters.



The mission of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime, and prevent underage drinking.



The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) is the leading manufacturing association, representing manufacturers in every industrial sector and in all 50 states. Our mission is to be the voice of all manufacturing in the U.S. and inform policymakers about manufacturing's vital role in the U.S. economy.



The Christian Coalition of America works to represent the pro-family agenda and support policies that will strengthen and preserve, rather than threaten, our families and our values.



The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) represents actors who work in film and television programs, commercials, video games, Internet, and all new media formats. The Guild exists to enhance actors' working conditions, pay, and benefits and to be a powerful, unified voice on behalf of artists' rights.



The USDA serving guide.

Food For Thought

What's on the school menu today? French fries, chips, or baked potatoes? Believe it or not, a battle is being fought over what is on your school lunch tray. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for creating nutritional guidelines for school lunches, and wants to limit the amount of white potatoes and other starchy vegetables to one cup a week, or two servings. This proposal affects everyone from the potato farmer to the cafeteria worker to the students eating the tater tots. Not surprisingly, all of these people have differing opinions...

Eat Your Broccoli

Supporters of limiting potato servings argue that potatoes are often served fried or topped with high calorie items like sour cream, cheese, and bacon. They also worry that when students are given a choice between French fries or something like carrots or green beans, they too often choose the fries. Poor eating choices made early in life lead to obesity and numerous long-term health problems like diabetes and heart disease.



Did you know?

The school cafeteria is the largest restaurant in the country, serving over 31 million students every single day.



More Please...

Serving sizes in school lunches are based on grade level and age.

Would you like fries with that?

Opponents of the proposed change offer that potatoes are full of nutritional value, and aren't always served in unhealthy ways. Fries can be baked rather than fried, and baked potatoes can be topped with healthier alternatives, like salsa. They also argue that potatoes are a cheap and plentiful option for a vegetable serving and that limiting potatoes would increase school lunch costs across the nation.

Interested?

The people on all sides of this argument have an **interest** in the outcome of the debate. That just means they are interested or concerned with how things end up. People pay attention to things that will likely affect their lives.



How might limiting starchy vegetables like potatoes affect...

Students?

Potato Farmers?

Schools?

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
|--|--|--|

Interest Groups

Name: _____



How does individual interest in a debate lead to action? What if people with these interests have *other* interests (like working or going to school) and can't spend their entire day learning what is happening and doing something about it? Potato farmers and nutritionists have little time for marching in front of the USDA or making speeches to the public!

Grouping Interests

One way people can have their voice heard is to find others with the same concerns. **Interest groups** gather people and resources to support public policies that help their members. They work to persuade policy makers like senators and representatives to support government actions that help their members and oppose actions that hurt them. They also work to influence public opinion by educating the general public about their point of view. In this way, interest groups **advocate**, or promote, the needs and wants of the group. There are hundreds of interest groups in the United States working on many different types of issues.

Terms to Know

Public Policy: the stand the government takes about a problem or an idea for improvement

Public Opinion: the collection of opinions or attitudes of a population

Types of Interest Groups

Most groups can be divided into five different categories.

| PUBLIC INTEREST | ECONOMIC INTERESTS | PROFESSIONAL GROUPS | IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS | SINGLE-ISSUE GROUPS |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Focuses on topics that affect the general public like education, the environment, and politics | Promotes the economic interests of their members in business, labor, and trade organizations | Advocates for people in a particular profession, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers | Promotes policies based on a set of core political or religious beliefs | Focuses on one narrow topic, such as immigration or drunk driving |

Taking Sides

In the school lunch potato battle, one group that supports the limits on starchy veggies is the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). The CSPI is a strong advocate for nutrition and food safety from a scientific perspective. On the other side of the discussion is the National Potato Council (NPC), which advocates for government policies that help U.S. potato growers prosper. Both groups work to inform the USDA and elected officials that *their* position on the issue is the correct one.



Support
Or
Oppose

Think of two goals each group might have that would either support or oppose the new USDA limits on potatoes in school lunches.

1.

2.

Vs.

1.

2.



Support
Or
Oppose

Interest Groups

Name: _____

The Potato Problem. Follow the steps below to create your own interest group and participate in the debate.

Step One: Which group do you want to be a part of and represent? (Circle One)

Students

Potato Farmers

Schools

Nutritionists

Step Two: What is your position on the limitation of starchy foods in school lunches? (Circle One)

I think it is a great idea.

I think it is a bad idea.

Step Three: What do you want to name your interest group?

Step Four: What reasons can you give to support your position? Try for at least two! (Use your reading for ideas.)



Step Five: Inform the public! Create a poster telling people about your interest group's position on the "Potato Problem."

Step Six: Inform the government! Use this space to list three things you would tell your elected official about the "Potato Problem." Try to be convincing!



Influencing Government

Interest groups use several strategies to influence government. The amount of influence that interest groups have on government is a major issue of concern for many people today. At the same time, millions of citizens rely on interest groups to make their voices heard.

Lobbying for Support

Interest groups hire **lobbyists** to meet with members of the government and discuss the group's issues and concerns. Lobbyists say that their job is to provide information to decision makers. The information lobbyists provide has been carefully chosen to persuade the audience to take one side of an issue. Lawmakers have to be aware of the **bias** in the lobbyists' messages and consider both sides before they make any decision.

Bias: favoring one view over another.



"K Street" is commonly used to describe lobbyists in Washington, DC. Many of the major lobbying groups have offices on this street.

Endorsing Candidates

During elections, some interest groups may **endorse**, or officially support, candidates. Groups choose a candidate to support based on what the candidate has done in the past and where the candidate stands on issues important to the group. Once the candidate is in office, he or she may introduce new bills, support existing laws, or use influence on important committees. In return, the interest group encourages its members to vote for that person in the next election. In addition, the interest group may donate money to the candidate's election campaign.

Raising Money

Interest groups raise money to support their efforts to influence the government. This creates the concern that interest groups can "buy" candidates by contributing lots of money to the candidate's election campaign. Once in office, such a candidate might be more concerned about pleasing the interest group than representing the voters. Because of this, there are strict rules about how interest groups may collect and donate money to political campaigns. Those that do must form a **political action committee (PAC)** that follows strict government rules about giving money to political candidates.

Not everyone agrees about what kinds of rules interest groups should have to follow. Some people fear that campaign financing laws limit the ability of people to support the causes they care about. Others fear that interest groups have grown to have more influence on government than the public at large, and that the groups should be controlled. The debate continues as some interest groups and wealthy individuals who support them find **loopholes**, or ways around, the campaign finance laws.

Strategies for Influencing Government:

Inform the public and elected officials about issues that matter to the group.



Donate money to political campaigns in exchange for support by the candidate.



Endorse a candidate running for office and suggest that the group's members vote for him or her.



Interest Groups

Name: _____

Vocabulary. Match the term to the correct definition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ___1. interest | A) favoring one view or another |
| ___2. advocate | B) attention paid to something |
| ___3. political action committee | C) to promote or support |
| ___4. interest group | D) collection of opinions or attitudes |
| ___5. bias | E) represent interest groups and communicate with officials |
| ___6. campaign financing | F) how money is earned to pay for political campaigns |
| ___7. lobbyist | G) organizations that help interest groups raise money for campaigns |
| ___8. public opinion | H) a group of people who work to influence government about a set of issues |



How Do You Lobby? Read each interest group lobby activity and decide if it is an example of informing (I), donating money (D), or endorsing a candidate running for office (E).

- | | |
|--|--|
| ___ 9. Representatives interview a candidate to see if he or she will support the group's position on nuclear plants. If so, the group will back this candidate. | ___ 12. Lobbyists visit with members of Congress and local officials to share their reasons for supporting or opposing an upcoming bill. |
| ___10. Volunteers from a teen health interest group go into schools and educate students about the dangers of underage drinking. | ___ 13. Once a candidate has been endorsed, members of an interest group help raise donations to help the candidate's campaign. |
| ___ 11. An interest group runs an ad that supports a candidate running for office. | ___14. A group runs TV and radio ads about an issue in order to raise public concern and spur the public to action. |

Just the Facts? Look at how two different interest groups address the same question. Draw a line matching each group to the answer it would give.

Question: Do guns in the home increase or decrease security in the home?

The Groups

The National Rifle Association (NRA) works to preserve law-abiding citizens' right to buy, have, and use firearms for legitimate purposes.



The Brady Campaign works to prevent gun violence. It was responsible for passing the Brady Bill in 1993, which required a five-day waiting period and a background check before someone can buy a handgun.



The Answers

Guns in the home are 22 times more likely to be used in a criminal, unintentional, or suicide-related shooting than in self-defense. When someone is home, a gun is used for protection in less than 2% of home invasion crimes.

Guns are used for protection 2.5 million times each year. Guns are used three to five times more often to stop crimes than to commit them.

Interest Groups

Name: _____

Who's Interested? Cut off the bottom half of the page and separate the cards. Place the description of the law or action taken by the government beneath the interest group most likely to have supported the policy.



The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.



The AARP works to improve the quality of life for people age 50 and older and help them with issues they face.



The American Medical Association works to promote the art and science of medicine and to improve public health.



Matching Activity



Cut along the dotted line!

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>The nation's second national park, Yosemite, was created in 1905 after this group lobbied President Theodore Roosevelt and the California legislature.</p> | <p>This group encourages funding for research and educational programs about the health effects of abusing alcohol and tobacco.</p> | <p>Members of this organization lobby Congress to protect Social Security, Medicare, and other retirement programs.</p> |
| <p>This group supported the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), which protects older Americans from being discriminated against in the workplace.</p> | <p>This organization works to stop the construction of nuclear power plants until the government passes more safety and environmental regulations.</p> | <p>This organization supported a 2009 law that bans tobacco ads within 1,000 feet of schools and playgrounds and also stops tobacco companies from sponsoring sports events.</p> |



Who's Interested? Activity

Types of Interest Groups

****TEACHER GUIDE****

Public Interest



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Single-Issue Group



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Economic Interest



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Ideological Group



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Professional Group



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| <u>C</u> 2. advocate | B) attention paid to something |
| <u>G</u> 3. political action committee | C) to promote or support |
| <u>H</u> 4. interest group | D) collection of opinions or attitudes |
| <u>A</u> 5. bias | E) represent interest groups and communicate with officials |
| <u>F</u> 6. campaign financing | F) how money is earned to pay for political campaigns |
| <u>E</u> 7. lobbyist | G) organizations that help interest groups raise money for campaigns |
| <u>D</u> 8. public opinion | H) a group of people who work to influence government about a set of issues |



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Cut along the dotted line!

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Sierra Club | AMA | AARP |
| AARP | Sierra Club | AMA |



Matching Activity