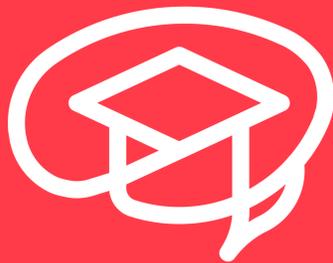


SHOULD THE U.S RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE TO \$15?

AN INQUIRY LEARNING LESSON



NEVERBORE

Should the U.S. federal minimum wage be raised to \$15/hour?

Background:

Many American cities and states have adopted \$15 minimum wage laws in the past few years, in response to worker protests and concerns that existing minimum wage levels left too many workers unable to escape poverty. But not everyone is on board. Some business leaders and economists argue that a \$15 minimum wage destroys low-skill jobs, incentivizes employers to replace workers with technology and shuts down businesses that can't afford it. Who is right? It's hard to tell, since research and economic theory are producing mixed results. This lesson is designed as an introduction to the issue, and teachers have the option to assign a brief formative assessment or more detailed summative assessment.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Explain both sides of the minimum-wage debate, using economic vocabulary
- Find at least five viable sources of evidence on this issue, including news reports, economic studies, government reports and personal interviews
- Develop an effective argument either in favor of or against the \$15 federal minimum wage, using and explaining evidence that supports their view

Materials:

Internet-ready devices and/or library for research
Smartboard/whiteboard/chart paper for brainstorming
Timer

Time: One class period (45-60 minutes); additional time if needed for formal research/writing, or this can be assigned as homework.

**Before beginning, the teacher should assign each student a partner AND assign each pair to be either "PRO" or "ANTI". There must be an equal number of "PRO" and "ANTI" teams, so if necessary create some groups of three.*

Instructions:

1. Post this question in the front of the room: **Should the federal government increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour?**
2. Ask students to brainstorm with a partner for 3 minutes: What do we need to know first in order to answer this question? Then ask each pair to share one response, continuing around the room until everyone has shared their responses. List all of the responses on the board. *(Responses may include: What is the minimum wage now? How much do people need to have an adequate standard of living? How much would you have left*

over after taxes if you work full time at \$15/hour? Can businesses afford to pay people \$15/hour? Could it cause inflation? Could it cause unemployment? What are drawbacks?) If students do not mention the current minimum wage, ask: What is the current federal minimum wage? *(It is \$7.25/hour)*

3. Assign each student a partner, and assign each pair to be a “PRO” or “ANTI” team. Explain that at this point, they should wait to form their personal opinion. They will have an opportunity to argue for/defend their own position. But for now, the goal is to flesh out the arguments on both sides, so it’s important that both sides be represented. Give each pair 15 minutes to do quick introductory research, using internet devices or library resources.

4. Review the critical importance of evaluating sources, especially if students are doing online research. “.edu” and “.gov” sources are generally more reliable than other sources, like “.org” or “.com.” If students are using articles from news media, encourage them to look for direct quotes from sources or organizations providing statistics. Discourage students from trusting in assertions like, “This will kill business,” or “We can’t live without it.”

5. Encourage students to save basic bibliography information on any sources they find/use, in case someone in class wants to access them later. They do not need to create formal citations at this point, though. They can list information in bullet points, like this. (Keep in mind students only need to research their assigned point of view.)

PRO example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A higher minimum wage will raise incomes and raise spending, which will increase the GDP. Economists at the Chicago Fed predicted that just a \$1.75 rise would increase aggregate household spending by \$48 billion in one year. ● \$7.25/hour is not enough to live on in most urban areas. For a full-time employee, that’s an after-tax income of about \$1000/month, or just \$12,000 a year.
ANTI example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The City of San Francisco predicted that an increase to \$15 would reduce the city's employment by about "15,270 private sector jobs." ● 21 European Union countries with higher minimum wages also have at least double the U.S. unemployment rate.

6. After 15 minutes, ask students to stop research, and assign each “PRO” pair to an “ANTI” pair. Ask the “PRO” students to make the best argument they can in favor of the \$15 minimum wage for five minutes, while the “ANTI” pairs listen and take notes. Then ask the “ANTI” students to make their best argument for five minutes. During this time,

the teacher should be circulating to keep students on task and listen in for arguments and use of evidence. Encourage students to offer specific support for their opinion, like the City of San Francisco example above.

7. At the end of 10 minutes, ask students to return to the large group. Ask students to share first the strongest arguments they heard in favor of the \$15 minimum wage. List these arguments on a whiteboard or chart paper (or ask a student to be the scribe), starring any arguments that are supported by data or research. Then ask students to share the strongest rebuttals to those arguments and the strongest arguments they heard against the \$15 minimum wage.
8. Students now have a basic background in both sides of the issue. For a formative assessment, teachers may wish to assign a brief one-paragraph essay taking a position on the question and offering 3-5 reasons for their side. For a more formal summative assessment, teachers may wish to assign a research-based essay (like the [Minneapolis Federal Reserve Essay contest](#)), which requires students to develop a more substantial analysis of the issue, including cited evidence from reputable sources.

Rubric for evaluating argumentative essays

	2 below expectations	3 meets expectations	4 exceeds expectations
Understanding the issue	May include mistakes in use/explanation of data May misuse economic vocabulary	Demonstrates understanding of economic issues involved Uses appropriate vocabulary	Demonstrates mastery of economic issues/questions involved References economic models and theory
Developing the argument	May make statements that don't fit logical argument. Evidence missing or lacking.	Argument flows logically. Evidence supports each point.	Argument is rhetorically persuasive. Evidence from multiple source supports each point.
Using source material	Source may be missing or not cited. Bibliographic material may be from questionable sites.	Source material is referenced in the class arguments and short essay. Bibliographic material is from reputable and reliable sources.	Bibliographic material reflects thorough research. Bibliographic material includes academic or government research.
Language and style	May include errors in grammar, spelling, structure. When discussing, students may use inappropriate language.	Written information uses good grammar and follows the basic argument and sentence structure. When discussing, students are respectful of one another and their opinions.	No errors in grammar, spelling, argument and sentence structure. When discussing, students closely listen and respond to one another's points.