

### Structured Academic Controversy (SAC)

Examining the Question: Should Wisconsin ban the use of American Indian mascots and logos in their public schools

Overview: This lesson employs the structured academic controversy method of teaching students about a controversial issue. The lesson begins by having students work in pairs to learn one side of a controversy—in this instance, the use of American Indian mascots in public schools. Next they team up with a pair who learned the other side of the issue. The pairs teach each other their positions while the pair not presenting takes notes. The students then switch positions and read more about the controversy. The group of four comes together and teaches the other side what they thought the best arguments were. Finally, students can abandon their assigned positions and discuss what they think about the issue. Many times, I bring the students together as an entire class to discuss the issue to conclude the lesson.

Time: Two 45 minute class periods (could easily use a third day to extend the discussion)

Class: American Government; Civics

Age of Students: This lesson is designed for eleventh grade students and is adaptable for ninth through twelfth grade.

### Day One

Hook: (5-10 minutes) Play the “tomahawk” chop song—easily obtained from Youtube. This is the music played at Atlanta Braves games and at the Florida State University - Seminole football games. While the music is playing also show the popular images of Indian mascots. Discuss any local American Indian mascots to show that may resonate with your students. Have students share words and terms that come to mind when they hear the music and see the mascots. Define **mascot** and have the students share what the purpose of a mascot is.

Introduce the Question: Should Wisconsin ban the use of American Indian mascots and logos in their public schools? Have the students write this question in their notebooks.

In Wisconsin, legislation was introduced that dealt with this topic, Assembly Bill 35, in the 2009-2010 legislative session. I shared this with students and discussed the legislation, giving them the opportunity to weigh in on the issue.

### The Discussion:

Put the students in heterogeneous groups of four. Hand out the pro/con packets on the two positions. In each group one pair will find arguments to support the position that Wisconsin

should ban the use of American Indian mascots and the other pair will find arguments to support the position that Wisconsin should not ban the use of American Indian mascots. At this point, students can physically move away from their groups of four to concentrate and work with their partner.

For this lesson, I began with two short videos that presented arguments that both sides could use. The partners were to take notes on arguments that supported their assigned position.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71de7iPZdYM&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH2ati2ysjQ&feature=related>

After watching the two short videos, the students worked with their partner to identify, at minimum, four quality arguments to support their position. The students wrote their argument in their notebooks.

The students then got back into their groups of four and shared their arguments with the other partners. The idea at this point is to share information, not argue about the issue. There is plenty of time allotted for students to share their opinions.

## Day Two

Review with students what they accomplished the day before and the procedures to follow for today's lesson. Students should now switch positions that they were originally assigned. Students should physically exchange their materials with their partner. The groups can discuss the arguments from their notes from the day before. I also have the students find an additional or new argument to share with in the groups of four. This step does not take as long as the initial research stage.

Students return to their groups of four and share their best arguments and the new one that they came up with. This stage can feel awkward, but I discuss with the students the value of looking at both sides of the issue.

Now, the students can abandon their assigned positions and discuss the issue. The goal is to have an authentic discussion in their small groups. I often set a discussion goal for the students. For example, the goal is to discuss the issue for five minutes apiece, etc.

## Extension of the Structured Academic Controversy

Watch *ENGAGE—Taking a Stand*. The video highlights a group of high school students who travel to Madison to give testimony in support of Assembly Bill 35, which would make it easier for a school district to eliminate the use of American Indian mascots, logos, or and/or nicknames.

After the video discuss the issue of the mascots with the whole class. I opened the discussion with the central question of the lesson: Should Wisconsin ban the use of American Indian mascots in their public schools? The discussion can also include issues raised by the video, particularly why and how the students chose to be activists surrounding this issue.

Resources:

Florida State University—6/17/2005 Press Release thanking Seminoles for historic vote of support <http://www.seminoles.com/trads/fsu-trads-osceola.html>

*Sports Illustrated* Flashback—The Indian Wars , Wednesday, August 17, 2005

<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2005/magazine/08/17/indian.wars030402/index.html>

<http://www.indianmascots.com/map/lists.htm> information on American Indian mascots in Wisconsin

American Psychological Association position on mascots from August 21, 2005

<http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/indian-mascots.aspx>

Letter to the Editor by high school student Zach Simones

<http://www.prescott-journal.pressenter.com/v155/n9/letters.htm>

