

China Lesson  
Debating the Three Gorges Dam Project  
Power to the People or Environmental Catastrophe?  
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Purpose: The enormous Three Gorges Dam is now being constructed in China on the upper Yangtze River. The project has generated plenty of controversy from the start. The dam will benefit many people, but it may also cause serious problems. Advocates say China's development depends on it. They say it will provide a clean source of energy for future generations. But critics say it could be a monumental ecological disaster.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the opposing viewpoints on the Three Gorges Dam Project?
2. Is controlling nature a worthwhile goal for humankind? What should be the relationship between us and the natural environment?
3. What will the overall impact be of the Three Gorges Dam Project?

Target Grade Level: 12 Geography/Technology. To scale down have students list pros and cons on large butcher block paper instead of debating the issue.

Materials:

1. Debate guidelines.
2. Computer and internet access.
3. Background information on the project using internet sources.
4. Classroom divided into two debate table groups opposite each other.

Activities:

1. Divide the class into two research groups. One group will represent the Chinese government and the pro side of the dam project. The other group will represent a major environmental group that opposes the dam project.
2. Group One (Pro Dam) should include:
  - A. Experts on alternative energy sources. Focus your energy on why this power is better than a reliance on coal.
  - B. Experts on flooding disasters and how this dam will prevent that.
  - C. Experts on trade and development in the area.
  - D. Experts on Chinese development.
3. Group Two (Opposition) should include:
  - A. Experts on resettlement of Chinese people.
  - B. Experts on pollution.
  - C. Experts on ecology/archeology.
  - D. Experts on corruption.
  - E. Experts on the environmental impact.
4. Give students two class periods to divide into groups and assign different topics and to do the research on the internet. There are a number of sites devoted to the overall impact of the project.

5. On day three students will be involved in a 40 minute debate on the Three Gorges Dam Project. The desks in the classroom should be arranged in two groups facing each other. The instructor should facilitate the debate using debate procedures outlined in a speech book.

#### Evaluation/Extension

1. Teacher will grade the facts and arguments presented in the debate and decide which group presented the stronger argument based on their research.
2. Large dam construction projects can be seen as humankind's attempt to control nature. Should we try to live in harmony with nature instead? Throughout history philosophers such as John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and Gifford Pinchot have argued about these and other ideas relating to human interaction with the world. Have students research the four writers. Have them create a venn diagram on how their philosophies differ. Then have students write their own philosophical statements about how humans should interact with nature.

Resources: The internet contains a number of sites on the dam project here are just a few-

#### Pictures of Dam

[www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/images/lg\\_map\\_page.html](http://www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/images/lg_map_page.html)

#### Project overview

[www.chinaonline.com/refer/ministry\\_profiles/threegorgesdam.asp](http://www.chinaonline.com/refer/ministry_profiles/threegorgesdam.asp)

[www.irm.org/programs/threeg](http://www.irm.org/programs/threeg) -

[www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/china.50/asian.superpower/three.gorges](http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/china.50/asian.superpower/three.gorges)

[www.probeinternational.org/pi/3g/index.cfm](http://www.probeinternational.org/pi/3g/index.cfm) -

