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**Preventing Genocides:**

**A Document-Based Argumentation (DBA) Activity**

This argument-centered instructional activity is designed to be implemented in use with the DBQ Project’s resource “Can the World Resolve the Problem of Genocide?”

The debatable issue for the activity is:

**Can the world’s leaders gather the political, military, diplomatic, legal, and economic strength to prevent future genocides?**

Activity Directions

1) Divide the class in half, assigning one half to the affirmative side on the debatable issue (that the world’s leaders ***can*** gather the strength necessary to prevent genocide) and the other half to the negative side.

2) Group students on each side into pairs. Distribute copies of the Argument Assembly Activity, and the Argument Assembler, to each pair of students.

3) Direct students to complete their Argument Assemblers. They should be sure to fill in their overall position. Their two argumentative claims are provided in the activity resource.

4) Students will build both of the argumentative claims. There isn’t one correct ordering of the argumentative claims, though students should be told to think about what would make for the best flow in a spoken or written argument for their position.

5) All three pieces of evidence should be used, and both examples of reasoning. Pairs will have to supply their own fourth piece of evidence, and their own reasoning for two pieces of evidence. Evidence and reasoning is randomly arranged on this activity document

6) When students have been given enough time to complete their Argument Assemblers, lead a discussion of their arguments. Discuss which evidence students used to support the two provided argumentative claims and which reasoning they matched with (or formulated for) this evidence. Discuss the argumentative claims and their relationship both to the evidence and to the overall position.

7) Now identify a leader from each side. That person will direct his side’s participation in the following group deliberation-debate. The leader for the affirmative side should designate two students to stand and speak the best versions of the arguments for this side. The leader for the negative side should then have two students from her side speak the two best versions of the negative’s two arguments.

8) Next, the negative side will make two counter-arguments against the affirmative’s first argument. The leader should call on two of his side’s students. Leaders should ensure that everyone has spoken once in the deliberation-debate before anyone can speak a second time. The affirmative side will then make two counter-arguments against the negative side’s first argument. Then back to the negative side for two counter-arguments to the affirmative’s second argument. Then two final counter-arguments from the affirmative against the negative’s second argument.

9) The negative side then tries to refute the affirmative’s counter-arguments, followed by a speech segment in which the affirmative side refutes the negative’s counter-arguments.

10) The deliberation-debate ends with each side giving a short, closing argument evaluation, analyzing how it is that when the arguments and evidence are compared, weighed, and evaluated, theirs is the winning position. These argument evaluations begin with the negative and end with the affirmative.

11) The teacher should be “flowing” the entire deliberation-debate on the Argument Assembly Flow Sheet, which should be projected on a large screen. All of the students should have their own flow sheet, on which they should also be tracking the argumentation.

12) The time limits for each segment of this deliberation-debate should be loose but carefully managed by the teacher-moderator. If a side is meandering or halting, their time should end. Sides should get time allotted as long as they are putting it to good use, but the teacher-moderator shouldn’t be reticent to move the proceedings along. The teacher-moderator should also provide analytic feedback to the students following the event. Argument Assemblers and flow sheets can be collected for checking or assessing.

Position: World leaders can gather the required strength to prevent future genocides.

**Argumentative Claims (reasons that the position is true)**

The international community certainly has the capacity to prevent genocides.

The international community has put in place a legal system that establishes clear norms and makes the identification of genocide unambiguous.

**Evidence (references to the documents to support the claims)**

(Document E) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states very clearly that all people have rights to “life” and “liberty,” and that no person “shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”

(Document C) The political cartoon in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* makes the point that assuming it has the will, the international community is positioned to use a larger military force than any single perpetrator of genocide could muster.

(Document J) “In October, 1995, a cease fire was reached. A formal peace agreement was signed in Dayton, Ohio in December, 1995. The agreement was meant not only to end the war, but also to build a democratic, multi-ethnic state. To a large degree, it is the United States that has stood behind the international commitment to maintain Bosnia’s borders and to compel the young state’s three main ethnic groups to share the responsibilities of government.”

**Reasoning (explanation as to *how* the evidence supports the claim)**

The simple fact is that a coalition of leading nations could produce and exert far more military strength than even any single nation – let alone any tribe or faction within a nation – who was intent on committing genocide could produce. There is no denying that world leaders have the strength to prevent future genocides, if they have the will to do so.

It is an essential first step in stopping genocide that it can be identified first. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lays out in clear language the rights that genocide overthrows.

Position: World leaders cannot gather the required strength to prevent future genocides.

**Argumentative Claims (reasons that the position is true)**

International responses to genocides have been slow and delayed.

In addition to being too late, international responses have also been too little – inadequate, insufficient, and weak.

**Evidence (references to the documents to support the claims)**

(Document D) Louis Lenkin, in his 2000 book titled *Realizing Human Rights*, makes the point that the international response to genocides that took place over the past 50 years in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, failed to deter these atrocities because of their predictable weakness and inadequacy.

(Document B) According to Irina Lagunina, in her 2004 report on genocide for Radio Liberty, the 1948 United Nations convention making genocide a violation of international law was not actually put into practice for 46 years.

(Document K) There have been 20 genocides committed around the world over the past 110 years, in which about 30 million people have been killed.

**Reasoning (explanation as to *how* the evidence supports the claim)**

Delaying the actual application of the UN convention against genocide for almost 50 years is a stark example of the way that international leaders have failed to act in a timely way to prevent or punish genocide. This is especially disturbing – and revealing of international weakness – because of the strong international consensus around “Never Again” that arose following the devastations of the Holocaust.

In the most significant genocidal atrocities of the past 50 years the pattern of international response has been clear: world leaders do not deploy the power that they presumably have and therefore do not act forcefully enough to prevent, or even punish, genocides.