Council for Economic Education

Policy Perspectives Activity Guidelines
As of 6/19/2017

Introduction

In Policy Perspectives, a digital interactive activity, students think critically about policy choices from the perspectives of varied personas.

Students begin the exercise by selecting one of several distinct personas, preferably one that seems to have a different perspective than their own. After reviewing the persona's biography, students select one aspect of a particular policy to consider. Then they will be prompted to respond to opinions about the policy in the role of the persona. Their response will trigger opposing responses from other personas, to which they can also respond.

If students believe that their persona would be swayed by the arguments made by others, they can change their response to the question. The activity tracks these interactions, and presents a printable record of them for discussion in the classroom. Students can select different aspects of a policy to consider, using the persona they originally selected, or a different persona.

The Council for Economic Education has launched this activity with a lesson exploring challenges and policy options for the US Social Security system. We plan to produce additional activities on other topics in the future.

Integrating the activity into your classroom

General Approach

Policy Perspectives was originally intended as an extension activity for lessons in CEE's Understanding Fiscal Responsibility series. However, the content is not tied to any particular lesson, and could be used as a standalone activity.

Here are several ways you could integrate the activity into your classroom:
- As a bell ringer to introduce a lesson covering the same topic
- As an extension activity to a lesson covering the same topic
- As homework with a follow-up classroom discussion
- As a full-period activity to attune students to thinking from different perspectives

Tips

- Encourage students to choose a persona that seems likely to have a different perspective on issues than their own
- Emphasize that students are meant to respond to questions as they think their selected persona would. They should be prepared to explain why they thought the persona would respond that way.
- Ask students to use the Save option (see Reviewing Results) and to copy and send the URL for their report to you. You can then share the results for discussion.

Suggested Questions for Class Discussion

- Why did you select your persona?
- When reading through the topic proposal, did you think about how your chosen persona would react to it?
- Consider a particular opinion:
  - Why did you think your persona would respond to the opinion as you indicated? What aspects of their biography did you focus on?
  - Did you adjust your persona's response after reading the counter-arguments made by other personas? Why?

Walkthrough

Launching Policy Perspectives

Open the interactive in a web browser using the URL provided for the topic under consideration, as listed below. The interactive should work well on any Internet-connected device with a screen of sufficient size to read the text, using any modern HTML5-compatible web browser. Javascript must be enabled, but no plug-ins like Flash are required. The activity is not designed for use on mobile phones, but should work well on most desktop, notebook and tablet computers.
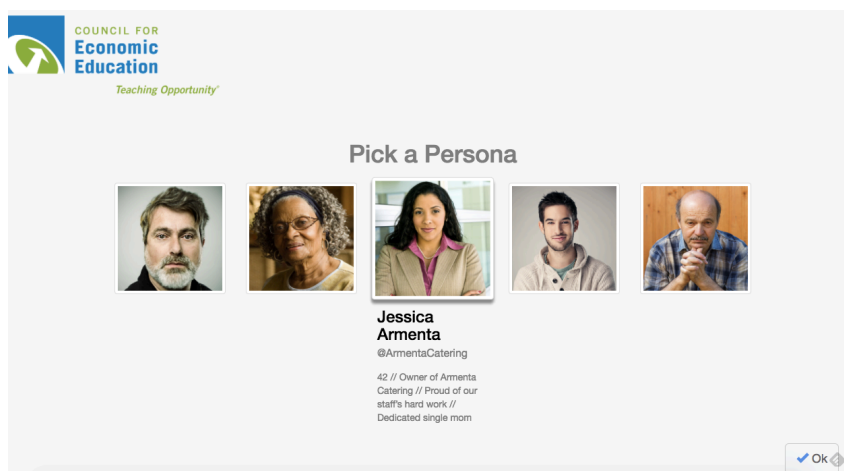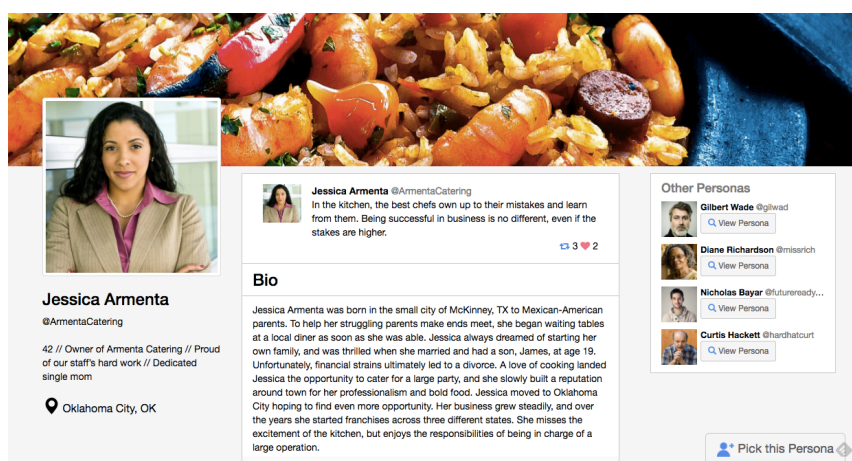
Social Security
http://technology.councilforeconed.org/perspectives-beta/socialSecurity

[Additional topics to be developed]

Pick a Persona

The first screen displays photos of the available persona choices. Click on a photo to display some brief facts about the persona, including their age, occupation, family status. To see more information, click the OK button in the lower right corner of the window, after clicking on one of the personas.
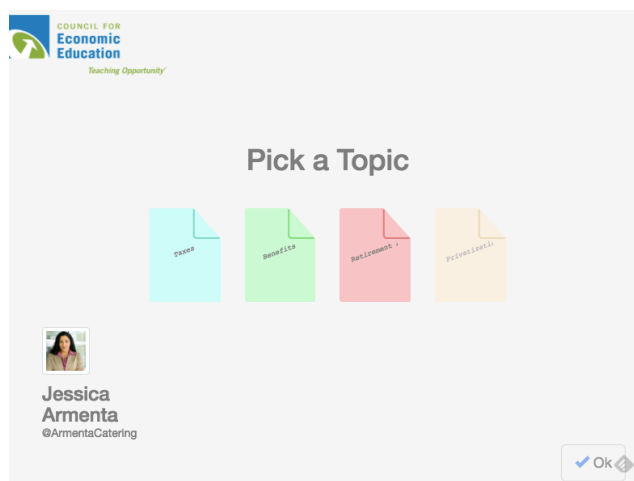

The persona detail screen displays additional information about the persona to help students develop a general idea of the persona's goals, principles, and beliefs. Additional personas can be investigated by clicking the View Persona buttons on the right side of the window. Click the Pick This Persona button to choose the persona you want to represent in the activity. Encourage students to select a persona that is different from themselves, so they can think about the topic from a different perspective.

Pick a Topic

After picking a persona, a screen showing several topics relating to the overall theme of the activity is displayed. Students can work through these in any order, and can pursue multiple topics if time permits. Click on each topic to see more information about it, then click the OK button to choose to proceed with the selected topic and display the topic screen.

Consider a Topic

Each topic screen outlines a problem, a proposed solution, and several methods that could be used to implement that solution. Students should read this information carefully, and think about how their chosen persona would respond to the proposal.

1. The first of four opinions on the proposal is shown below the outline, on the left of the screen. A sliding scale is displayed to its right. Students participate by considering how

their chosen persona would react to that opinion, and adjusting the indicator accordingly, along a range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Click the Submit button to register the choice.

2. Completing Step 2 will trigger an automated counter-argument from one of the other personas. Students should type a response to their argument in the blue quote box below it, and click the Done button in the lower right when complete. This dialogue will be logged, and used in classroom discussion later.

3. If after submitting an argument, if the student thinks that the other persona's counter-argument would sway their chosen persona's opinion, they can alter the persona's reaction to the opinion by moving the selector on the sliding scale, then clicking the Resubmit button. This change will be logged for later discussion.

Click Next Opinion to display the next of the four opinions. Students can interact with it in the same manner as described above, and continue doing so until they have responded to all four opinions.

Reviewing Results

After working through the last opinion, a View Responses button will be displayed in the lower right, in place of the Next Opinion button. Click this button to see a report of questions, responses and counter-arguments. This report is intended as a basis for further classroom discussion. Click the Save button on the right to generate a unique URL for the report that can be copied and sharing for review. Click the Print button to print the report to a selected printer, or to print to a PDF if your browser provides that option.

Next Steps

If time permits, students can click the New Topic button to work through another topic with the same persona. Alternatively, students can click the New Persona button to select a different persona to work through the same topic again, or a different topic.