



RESPECTFUL DEBATE: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PROTEST



Peter Turnley/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images Source: [ABC News.com](https://www.abcnews.com) (2018)

Was the government crackdown on student protests at Tiananmen Square justified?

Rationale: As students learn about political change and protest movements in world history they will encounter the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests. In this lesson, students will weigh opposing perspectives on whether the government was justified in using force to crack down on the protests. As students engage in a respectful debate, listen to both sides of the argument to regulate their emotions, build collective understanding and empathy for how aspects of the U.S. education system disadvantage some and yet offer advantages to others. Such skills are necessary for students to practice to support their efficacy in participating in and leading respectful debates for healthy civil discourse.

Objective(s): Students will analyze and debate the facts, timeline of events, and perspectives on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Students will engage a variety of sources to analyze and

summarize arguments on both the perspective of the government and protestors to practice their empathy raising and perspective-taking skills.

Standards:

- **NJSLS-SS. 6.1.12.HistorySE.14.b:** Use a variety of sources from diverse perspectives to analyze the social, economic, and political contributions of marginalized and underrepresented groups and/or individuals.
- **NJSLS-SS. 6.1.12.HistoryCC.16.b:** Determine past and present factors that led to the widening of the gap between the rich and poor, and evaluate how this has affected individuals and society.
- **NJSLSA.RI.11-12.7.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Focal SEL Skill: Social Awareness

- Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ.

Materials & Resources

- Notebook
- Pencil/Pen
- A computer connected to a projector for the teacher
- Chromebooks for students with internet access
- [Britannica: Tiananmen Square Incident Summary, Facts & Details](#)
- [Tiananmen Square: 6 Facts to Know](#)
- PBS Frontline [Timeline: What Led to the Tiananmen Square Massacre](#)
- *Economic Times*: [China Defends Tiananmen Square Crackdown As 'Fully Correct'](#)
- Vox Article: [This 1989 Speech is one of the most important in history](#)

Timing: Can range from one 45 minute lesson to two 45-minute lessons.

Lesson Procedure:

Part I: Introduction & Preparation (40 minutes):

1. Homework Activity

To familiarize students with the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, have students read and take notes on the following *Time Magazine* article: [Tiananmen Square: 6 Facts to Know](#). Warn students that one of the images in the article shows graphic violence. Encourage them to use a note-taking method the class might be familiar with as they read and watch the embedded videos. Make a note to share with the students that the government response was regarded by the West as a massacre.

2. Do Now (5 minutes)

As students get settled into class tell them ***“today we are going to engage in a respectful debate about grade inflation and how it correlates to factors such as socioeconomic status and race. Now that you have some knowledge of the Tiananmen Square protests you will investigate additional sources to help you consider whether or not the Chinese government’s response to the protests was justified, given the perspectives you’ve investigated.”*** To prime their thinking, have them respond in writing and then briefly discuss the quote made in a little known 1989 speech by a former high-ranking Chinese Communist leader below.

"China will lose all hope if we let turmoil have its way and open the door to capitalism, ... The nature of this turmoil is extremely clear: its bottom line is death to our Party and state." (Li Xiannian, June 1st, 1989)

Source: Fisher, Max. This 1989 Speech is one of the most important in China’s history and only 8 people heard it”. Vox.com. June 2, 2014. Online article. [Web address](#)

3. Introductory Activity - Debrief Homework (15 minutes)

To build students’ background knowledge about the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest, review the main points of the article and videos reviewed for homework. Also, discuss the terms about which they took notes, and feel free to add any of the following vocabulary words to the list:

- Economic reform
- Tiananmen Square
- People’s Liberation Army
- Goddess of Democracy
- Martial Law
- Rule of law

- Democratic reform
- massacre

4. Arrange Student Groups (to be done in advance)

Divide the class into two groups, one group will assume the “pro” side and the other half will assume the “con” side. Tell the students that ***“Today we will engage in an activity called Respectful Debate to practice the skill of perspective-taking. This is a skill that you will need to be an effective and involved citizen in your school and community as well as a global citizen. It involves debating not just one side of the debate you agree with but also taking the side of a debate that you don’t agree with”.*** Inform the class that ***“taking the position of a side you disagree with is the essence of Respectful Debate and this part of the lesson will help you build mutual understanding on the topic”.***

5. Prepare for the Respectful Debate (35 minutes)

Distribute materials (optional in advance): Provide students the links to the source material and have students read it to gain a general overview of the debate. Tell the students that they are going to read two articles in support of the protests and two articles that provide the perspective of the government leadership at the time supporting a crackdown on the protests. Encourage students to take notes in a method of their preference to organize and prepare their arguments for both sides of the argument.

Generate ideas: Both sides have fifteen five minutes to write down as many examples as they can, to support their position.

Assign roles: You may wish to have students assign roles in their respective groups, determining who will be the *note taker*, the *timekeeper*, *debaters*, and *debate researchers* who can go back to the lesson resources to gather key points made in the debate. Note the number of debaters can range from one student presenting every point to multiple students presenting fewer points each. Explain to the students that your role is to guide the students through the debate steps.

Part II: Engaging the Respectful Debate (15 minutes)

1. **Reconvene** as a whole class.
2. **Pro side starts the debate:** “Pro” side gives their position and supports with one or two examples to support their position.

3. **Con side summarizes** (“reflects back”) what the “pro” side said and confirms with the pro side whether they summarized accurately. If not, the “pro” side can offer clarifying statements. Then the “con” side gives their own position and supports with one or two examples.
4. **Pro side responds:** “Pro” side summarizes what the “con” side said and confirms with the “con” side whether they summarized accurately. If they did not, they can provide clarifying statements. The “pro” side then has the option of providing one additional example in support of their own position, if they wish.
5. **“Con” side responds:** “Con” side summarizes what the pro side said and confirms with the pro side whether they summarized accurately. If not, the “pro” side can provide clarifying statements. The “con” side then has the option of providing one additional example in support of their own position.

Part III: Debaters Switch Sides for Perspective Taking (15 minutes)

1. **Debaters will swap sides:** Using the same debate statement, have the “pro” side and “con” side switch and repeat steps 1-5 as well as the “generate ideas” and “assign roles” steps of the lesson preparation. The switching of sides is a *critical element of the lesson* to help stretch student thinking to see the topic from a different perspective.

Part IV: Reflection & Assessment (8-10 minutes)

1. Facilitate a conversation about the skill of “Perspective Taking”, which is the ability to see situations from multiple perspectives. Sample questions include:
 - Has your opinion changed at all about whether or not the government was justified to crack down on the protests with violence? How so?
 - Did summarizing what the other side said and/or switching sides change your opinion? What about the summary was helpful?
 - What lessons does this activity teach us about opinions we have today about issues in the news or historical events?
 - How might debates like this help you question issues in history, current events, or the school, and consider other perspectives?

- How does exercising mutual respect for opposing views bring different results from debating opposing views?
- What did it feel like to disagree with someone's points of view but also hold an appreciation for their point of view? How might this skill be helpful in society today?

Formative Assessment: After the discussion, have students choose any one of the questions, or you may assign a question, to write in on a paper for an exit ticket or a digital padlet posting [padlet website](#). Padlet is a Google-chrome extension. Feel free to modify this step as you see fit for your learners.

Lesson Extension: Have students collaborate in small groups of 3-4 to research individual freedoms held by Chinese citizens today by reviewing the information provided by Amnesty International [amnesty.org](#). Have students present their comparison of freedoms held by Chinese citizens to freedoms of US citizens and US-held territories, like Puerto Rico on a poster board/chart paper to the class. Have the groups share out and then the posters around the classroom.