

4-H State Presentation Day

Problem-Solving Category Fact Set

“Pledge of Allegiance”

The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 and originally read “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Minor changes were made over the years, such as the substitution of “my flag” for the phrase “the flag of the United States of America.” However, none of these changes were as controversial as the addition of the phrase “under God” in 1954, during the Cold War fight against communism.

Today, there is much debate on whether the phrase should be removed to create a non-denominational pledge that is more suitable to the many different religions practiced in America. In 2002, a California resident sued the California state Supreme Court for the removal of the phrase on behalf of his atheist daughter. He won in the state Supreme Court, but was overruled by the Federal Supreme Court on the grounds that he did not have the right to sue on behalf of his daughter. This decision left the phrase in the pledge, without coming to a strong consensus on whether it is constitutional or not.

Proponents of leaving the Pledge of Allegiance as it is today argue that it is a part of American tradition and is largely supported by the American public. Furthermore, the phrase “under God” is not mandating or validating a particular religious belief, and should not be eliminated.

Critics of the phrase point out that it was only added 57 years ago, not long enough to be a true part of the American tradition. They also argue that it violates the principle of separation of church and state, a core belief of the American Founding Fathers. Finally, the phrase, while not specific to a particular religion’s God, does alienate atheists or nonbelievers and does not acknowledge those religions that do not embrace one central God.

Select either Option A or B and develop a presentation that addresses the issues raised in each option and other issues you may determine. You may not mix the options. You will be judged on the effectiveness of your presentation and not the accuracy of your arguments.

Option A: You believe that the Pledge of Allegiance should remain as-is. You will need to convince the Supreme Court that the phrase “under God” is not a violation of anyone’s Constitutional rights by using the following arguments:

1. The phrase “under God” does not mandate a particular God and therefore does not validate or support one specific religion.
2. 80% of the American population is a Christian religion, and therefore the majority of people will not be offended by this phrase.
3. The phrase “under God” is a part of American civic culture, as it also appears on American currency and references to God appear in legislature and the Presidential oath.

Option B: You are against the phrase remaining in the Pledge of Allegiance. You will need to convince the Supreme Court to remove this phrase based on the following reasons:

1. Including the phrase “under God” in the American Pledge of Allegiance violates the core American principle of separation of church and state.
2. The phrase was a recent addition to the Pledge, and therefore does not have a historical value on which to base preserving it.
3. A pledge that includes a reference to God excludes people who are atheist or do not believe in one central God, and is therefore offensive to those people and violates their constitutional rights.

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"Lowering Voting Age"

Passed in 1971, the 26th Amendment gave 18 - 20 year olds the right to vote in American elections. Now, 40 years later, there is a movement to lower the voting age even further to allow citizens as young as 16 years old the opportunity to vote in local, state, and federal elections.

Voting facts:

- Voting has been on the decline in young populations, with only 47% of the 18 - 24 year old population voting in the 2004 presidential election;
- Older populations are the most likely to vote, but make up a smaller portion of the population eligible to vote, meaning they are disproportionately represented in the voting process;
- Voting is a habit that is learned early in life; if young people begin voting at a younger age, it is more likely they will continue to vote throughout their lifetime.

Supporters of lowering the voting age point out that young Americans are treated as adults in many cases; youth pay sales tax and those with jobs pay income tax; youth can get drivers licenses; and youth can be tried as an adult in certain criminal court proceedings. The age that young people begin to vote is now 18 years old, which coincides with a chaotic time in a young person's life - they may be graduating high school, moving away from home; getting a job, or joining the military service. With other things getting in the way of voting, they are unlikely to start the positive habit of voting.

Those against lowering the voting age argue that the initial reasons for setting the voting age at 18 have not changed - that is the age at which a person can die for their country whether it is by voluntarily joining or being drafted into the military. Political experts argue that young people below the age of 18 do not have the life experience and do not know the issues in enough detail to make conscious, informed voting decisions.

Select either Option A or B and develop a presentation that addresses the issues raised in each option and other issues you may determine. You may not mix the options. You will be judged on the effectiveness of your presentation and not the accuracy of your arguments.

Option A: You support lowering the voting age to 16 years old. You will need to convince your state legislature using the following arguments:

1. Young Americans are treated as adults through taxation, some criminal cases, and their ability to get drivers licenses. If they have these adult responsibilities, they should also be allowed to vote.
2. Politicians currently have no incentive to represent the youth age group because young people are unable to vote for their representatives. Allowing them to vote will create politicians more responsive to the unique needs of youth.
3. Voting needs to become a habit, and the best way to do this is to allow young people to start voting early when they are stationary in their lives, and not when they are 18 and undergoing many lifestyle changes.

Option B: You are against lowering the voting age. You will need to convince the Supreme Court to remove this phrase based on the following reasons:

1. The voting age was initially set to match the age at which a person is able to serve their country through military service. Since that age has not changed, therefore the voting age should not as well.
2. Although 16 year olds are treated as adults in certain cases, they still lack the life experience that truly creates a responsible voter.
3. Voting is not the only way of becoming involved in the political process. Youth are not prohibited from becoming involved through petitioning politicians or working for political campaigns.

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Problem-Solving Category Fact Set

“Compulsory Military Service”

Compulsory military service refers to a system where, upon turning 18 years old, a person must enroll in the military service for traditionally 1 – 3 years. Many countries throughout the world have this system, including Austria, Brazil, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Russia, and Switzerland to name a few. There are different types of service that can be performed during this time other than combat, such as logistics or intelligence work. A conscript is a person who has been forced into the military due to mandated service.

The United States does not have a compulsory military service upon becoming an adult at 18 years old; however, until 1973 there was something called a draft where men could be forced to fight for the military. This was historically only used during times of war, such as World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. Today, the United States military is by volunteer only, although there is a Selective Service System that requires men between 18 and 25 to register just in case there is a need to call a draft.

People who support enacting a compulsory military service system in the United States believe that it strengthens the military, national security, and preparedness in case of an emergency. They also believe that a voluntary system like what America has now actually encourages poor or underprivileged people to apply by offering financial or educational incentives. Eliminating the voluntary system would create a more culturally diverse military.

Critics of a compulsory military service system point out that professional soldiers who voluntarily join the military service have better training and are more motivated to be better soldiers. Time spent in the military is also seen as time spent away from transitioning to college or a career and could potentially divert young people away from higher education. They also believe that this would create an inefficient military that wastes time and money training soldiers who will leave after only 1 – 3 years.

Select either Option A or B and develop a presentation that addresses the issues raised in each option and other issues you may determine. You may not mix the options. You will be judged on the effectiveness of your presentation and not the accuracy of your arguments.

Option A: You believe that the United States should have a compulsory military service upon turning 18. You will need to convince the Secretary of Defense by using the following arguments:

1. Mandatory military service would increase the number of potential soldiers in case of war, which would improve national security and make America more prepared for an emergency.
2. America's current volunteer-based system provides education and financial incentives to apply. This leads to more low-income or underprivileged people applying for the military in order to receive these opportunities they otherwise could not afford.
3. If all young people are forced to participate in military service, the military will be strengthened by equality and cultural diversity.

Option B: You are against compulsory military service. You will need to convince the Secretary of Defense to leave the military service as-is based on the following reasons:

1. People who volunteer to join the military service are choosing to be there and are motivated to be better soldiers than those who are forced to join.
2. Requiring 18 year olds to join the military would divert them away from college and could have a negative effect on the economy as people receive less education.
3. Spending money to train conscripts who will leave after 1 – 3 years wastes resources that the United States government does not have and creates an inefficient military.