

## **The Rise and Fall of Sooner Socialism: A Historical Student Debate over Economic Systems**

About this lesson

Grade Level: High School

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Time: One to three class  
periods

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**Brief Lesson Description** Students will prepare for and participate in a debate examining the pros and cons of capitalism and socialism through the eyes of Oklahomans prior to the end of World War I. They will research the opinions of Oklahomans of the era through primary source documents.

### **Time**

- Instruction – 10 to 20 minutes
- Research and Debate Preparation – 100 to 150 minutes (can be done outside class time)
- Debate – 50 minutes

### **High School Oklahoma History PASS Correlations**

- Standard 1 – Students will demonstrate process skills in social studies.
  - Students will analyze primary source documents.
  - Students will interpret information from a broad selection of research materials.
- Standard 5 – Students will describe the development of constitutional government in Oklahoma.
- Standard 8 – Students will examine the factors that contributed to the political, economic, and social history of Oklahoma during the twentieth century.
  - Students will analyze the impact of the Populist Movement.

### **Suggested Primary Source Documents**

- The Oklahoma State Constitution
- Writings of the Socialists and Anti-Socialists
- Newspaper Articles – The Daily Oklahoman Archives can be accessed at [www.newsok.com](http://www.newsok.com) – Click on Archives and then on Search

### **Procedure**

1. Brief Definitions of Terms:
  - Economy – The production and distribution of goods, services, and information.
  - Capitalism – Economic system in which individuals control the means of the production and distribution of goods, services, and information.

- Socialism – Economic system in which the government controls the means of production of goods, services, and information.
2. Explain the importance of placing oneself in the historical context of a situation in understanding what the events of the past meant to those that lived them.
  3. Review with the students the story of Sooner Socialism and the reaction to it. Discuss the progressive elements of the Oklahoma State Constitution and the reasons for them. Discuss the influence of World War I on ending Sooner Socialism.
  4. Provide students with Handout 1 – Debate Prompt.
  5. Divide the students into pro and con groups.
  6. Remind the students that they will be debating from the point-of-view of those that lived in Oklahoma prior to the end of World War I and not from their own point-of-view in the modern world.
  7. Provide students with access to the primary source documents, time to research, and time to prepare for the debate.
  8. Stage the debate using a standard debate format that fits the number of students and topics involved in the debate. The debate may include many other topics researched by different groups of students or it may be one large debate just over Sooner Socialism.

### **Closure**

After the debate, ask the students to discuss the elements of a market economy and why market forces tend to yield much higher productivity than a command economy. Ask students to describe the merits of government control over some elements of the economy today.

### **Extension**

Have students use the archives of *The Oklahoman* to research the economic and political environment in Oklahoma prior to World War I.

Have students use the archives of *The Oklahoman* to research current articles on capitalism and socialism.

Tales of Oklahoma Project  
Oklahoma Council on Economic Education

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**Handout 1 – Debate Prompt**



Debate Prompt: Be it resolved that socialism be the primary economic system for the State of Oklahoma. This shall include state ownership of banks, utilities, railroads, factories, and farms to be operated by the citizens of the state for the common good of the citizens of the state.

Point-of-View: A citizen of Oklahoma after statehood and prior to the end of World War I (1907 to 1918). All points of debate must be from this era and cannot be based on what we know now about socialism today.

Research Sources

- Your textbook and other secondary sources
- The Daily Oklahoman Archives – [www.newsok.com](http://www.newsok.com) – Click on Archives and then on Search
- The writings of the Socialists and Anti-Socialists

Primary Source Inclusion Requirement: Each debate point must reference at least one primary source document.

Procedure

- As a team, research the topic and prepare your position.
- Debate the issue following the standard debate format.

Debate Position (circle one):  
Resolution

Pro – For the Resolution

Con – Opposed to the

Date of Debate: \_\_\_\_\_