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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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# Web Resources for Controversial Issues

## Question

Are there good websites that deal with current events and issues such as debates and give solid foundations of what the problem is?

## Answer

In a word: Yes!

The difficulty lies in finding the *best* of the many websites attempting to do just that.

I will focus my answer on the best **free** websites for high school teachers and students. Each of these sites has concise background information on each issue and presents a thorough explanation of the opposing positions.

There are also many outstanding resources that require a fee or subscription; among the best pay sites are [CQ Researcher](#) and [Opposing Viewpoints](#); check with your media specialist to see if your school or community library subscribes to these.

Which site works best for you depends on what type of issue you are learning about.

For **current public policy issues**, like health care reform and immigration policy, the best three sites are below. For a quick look at how each site presents the health care debate, click here: [ProCon.org](#); [National Discussion and Debate Series](#); [Debatepedia](#).

### 1. [ProCon.org](#)

: an independent non-profit founded by Steven C. Markoff "to provide resources for critical thinking and to educate without bias."

#### Strengths:

- Best student-oriented background information on each issue, including videos, political cartoons, and infographics
- 40 current controversial issues
- Each issue contains a "core question" and multiple sub-questions that address constitutional, policy, and ethical issues
- Extensive list of pro and con arguments for each question, excerpted from major newspapers, and experts' and political leaders' words
- Credibility of each source is rated with 1-5 stars based on procon.org's "theoretical expertise ranking"
- Lesson plan ideas

#### Weaknesses:

- No hyperlinks to original sources
- Some issues are not related to public policy or the Constitution

### 2. [National Discussion and Debate Series](#)

: video, text, and links from debates at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs. This program was created "to encourage a vigorous, well-informed discussion on the national stage about the major issues of our time."

#### Strengths:

- Centered around video footage of a live debate among well-known experts in a formal setting
- PDF transcripts of each debate
- Excellent examples of civil discourse and debate techniques



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- High-level academic "white paper" backgrounders and "jump to" background videos from PBS Newshour

**Weaknesses:**

- Content is designed for high-level readers with some background knowledge of the issue; background information may be inaccessible to struggling readers
- Only 13 current controversial public policy issues
- Updated annually, does not include very recent developments

3. [Debatepedia](#)

: "the Wikipedia of debates...an encyclopedia of pro and con arguments and quotes. A project of the [International Debate Education Association \(IDEA\)](#), "Debatepedia utilizes . . .wiki technology . . . to engage you and other editors in centralizing arguments and quotes found in editorials, op-eds, books, and around the web into comprehensive pro/con articles."

**Strengths:**

- Unlimited number of issues
- Constantly updated by users
- Students can add content

**Weaknesses:**

- Like Wikipedia, content is added by users—not professional editors—so quality and credibility can be questionable
- Many issues lack depth
- Background information is minimal for many issues

For **very recent events that have not yet been clearly defined as a policy or constitutional issue**, like the January 8, 2011 shootings in Tucson, Arizona, the best site is [PBS NewsHour Extra](#). This site includes background readings, video clips from PBS NewsHour, lesson plans, and daily updates.

**Other sites for teaching about current controversial issues:**

[Teaching With the News](#): Created by the CHOICES program at Brown University. Frequently updated with free lesson plans, video clips, and multiple perspectives on current global issues and foreign policy controversies.

[TeachableMoment.org](#): Created by the Morningstar Center for Teaching Social Responsibility. Updated with a new topic from the news each week. Less balanced than the three sites above, it relies primarily on the New York Times for content.

[Today's Best Political Cartoons](#): Updated daily, archived by topic, and searchable. Political cartoons are an engaging tool for students to probe current issues and controversies.

[DoSomething.org](#): Focused on inspiring young people to volunteer to take action to solve problems in their communities. Good background on many problems, but with a focus on volunteerism more than policy discussion.

 **Ask a Historian**

Flinging the first American flag to the breeze

 **Ask a Master Teacher**

How do you teach the effects of WWI on art and literature? Translating a content standard into a solid lesson plan.

 **Ask a Digital Historian**

Needed: directions to reliable databases for historic images.

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