



GREAT DECISIONS IN THE CLASSROOM



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Great Decisions is America's largest discussion program on world affairs. The name is shared by a national civic-education program, briefing book, teacher's guide and PBS television series produced by the Foreign Policy Association. The *Great Decisions* program highlights eight critical foreign policy challenges facing Americans each year. In schools across the country, students using *Great Decisions* discuss and debate each issue and complete a national opinion ballot to communicate their views to Congress and the White House. Supported by the Foreign Policy Association for over 50 years, *Great Decisions* involves students in the foreign policy making process.

There are countless benefits to using *Great Decisions* in the classroom, but here are a few.

Great Decisions:

- Builds global competence.
- Improves knowledge of geography.
- Promotes civic participation.
- Fosters a comprehensive understanding of political affairs.
- Provides an opportunity for students to engage in discussion and exercise critical thinking skills.

PART I: GETTING STARTED

PROGRAM FORMATTING

Great Decisions is used in a variety of ways throughout the country by high schools, colleges and universities. As such, there are a number of ways to structure a *Great Decisions* program, which include but are not limited to:

- As a class, like at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) and [University of North Carolina Wilmington](#)
- As a student-led group, like [Wayzata High School Student Great Decisions Discussion Group](#)
- As a supplement to a history, current events or social studies class in high schools or colleges
- As part of extracurricular programming like Model U.N., World Quest or debate

Your use of *Great Decisions* should consider a variety of factors, including goals, audience, flexibility of your curriculum, funds available for speakers and student interest.

MATERIALS

All students should have individual copies of the of the [Great Decisions briefing book](#), and all classrooms need a copy of the [Great Decisions in Foreign Policy series on PBS](#) to watch ahead of the discussion. The Foreign Policy Association also provides free online materials at www.GreatDecisions.org, such as a monthly e-newsletter, blogs and more. A digital copy of the Teacher's Guide is complimentary with the purchase of the [teacher's](#) or [classroom](#) pack.

All materials are available at www.GreatDecisions.org.

PART I: GETTING STARTED



BRIEFING BOOK

The *Great Decisions* briefing book is published annually and ships in January, and consists of eight chapters on topics selected by the *Great Decisions* editorial advisory board, with input from *Great Decisions* participants.

School bookstores, libraries, teachers and professors can order the briefing book directly at www.GreatDecisions.org.

DVD

Each episode of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series aligns with topics covered in the briefing book. Many teachers and professors find that screening the television series immediately before discussion helps refresh students' understanding of the issue gained through reading the article.

DVDs of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series can be ordered online from www.GreatDecisions.org.

A digital version of the series can also be purchased through iTunes.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The *Great Decisions* [teacher's guide](#) is an electronic publication written by teachers, and is geared to high school students. The *Great Decisions* [teacher's guide](#) is meant to be used in conjunction with the book and each of the eight chapters line up with briefing book. The guide supplies you with the following:

- Handouts
- A list of key terms for each chapter
- Suggestions for discussion and for classroom activities

The teacher's guide is complementary with the purchase of a [teacher's](#) pack or [classroom](#) pack.

You can also find a list of recommended supplementary readings in the briefing book and online on www.GreatDecisions.org.

PART II: GREAT DECISIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

For some schools, the format of a *Great Decisions* class is very much similar to that of a discussion group. Some institutions, such as the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) and [University of North Carolina Wilmington](#), bring in guest speakers for each class and engage with other local community groups. Others may partner with outside organizations, like the World Affairs Councils, or other schools to build a lecture series, and then provide a for-credit course at their institution. Finally, you may choose to use the briefing book in a smaller discussion group format, perhaps as a base text for a seminar.

Some of the ways *Great Decisions* has been used in the past are as:

1. An introductory course
2. A required course for international affairs majors
3. An advanced undergraduate seminar

The *Great Decisions* briefing book contains eight chapters that do not necessarily have to be taught concurrently, providing you with a number of different ways to break up topics.

HIGH SCHOOLS

A *Great Decisions* course can either be a subsection of a larger course (e.g., current events, world politics, political science) or a full high school course.

As a supplement for AP courses, such as [AP World History](#) and [AP Comparative Politics](#), *Great Decisions* helps build students' regional knowledge, provide real-world examples of political institutions in action, and introduce public policy challenges in a current events context.

High schools offering a *Great Decisions* course are encouraged to use the teacher's guide.



PART III: GREAT DECISIONS IN MODEL U.N., WORLD QUEST & DEBATE

MODEL U.N.

For Model U.N. groups, using *Great Decisions* — notably the briefing book — provides students with background information on key foreign policy topics. Like the CIA World Factbook, *Great Decisions* provides a jumping off point for policy briefings used in Model U.N.

EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING (FOREIGN EXTEMP) AND DEBATE CLUBS

For Foreign Extemp, *Great Decisions* is a quick primer on both regional and international affairs issues.

For debate clubs, *Great Decisions* is recommended as a briefing and background tool as well, and it also provides students with a wealth of recommended scholarly sources.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Each year's materials become available for purchase on January 1.
2. You will need funding to purchase materials through your school, which can take a few weeks, especially for larger purchases outside of your standard budget.

WORLD QUEST

Great Decisions is a [recommended resource](#) for Academic World Quest by the World Affairs Councils. Along with the topics chosen by the leaders of World Affairs Councils across the country, the competition includes some topics from *Great Decisions*. Your group can either order the books directly from the FPA or through your local participating Council.

PART IV: STUDENT-LED GREAT DECISIONS GROUPS

Great Decisions can be used in a number of ways by student groups, whether on the K-12 or college level. The book and DVD can be used by a number of different types of student groups — from Roosevelt Institute chapters to International Relations Student Association — to introduce students or deepen their understanding of some of the most critical issues facing American policymakers today.

***Great Decisions* can be used:**

- As the foundation for a lecture series
- As supplementary material for a pre-existing student discussion group on international affairs
- As a stand-alone discussion group program



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

I. A Venue

If you're using *Great Decisions* as a student group, you'll need a venue on campus. Each student group is unique, but a good group leader should ask some key questions when trying to find a space where the discussion group will be held. One might consider a few basics:

- Does the meeting space have enough room for all students to sit comfortably?
- Does the space enable discussion — that is, can students easily see and hear each other?
- Does the meeting space have an audio/visual capacity so you can make use of the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* television series?
- Is the meeting space free of noise and distractions?

II. A Discussion Leader and Coordinator

Each group needs an instructor(s) and a coordinator. The instructor(s) will be in charge of facilitating discussions during meetings. The coordinator will be responsible for the administrative work, media outreach and general planning behind the group. Who's who depends on your school's policy for student groups.

PART IV: STUDENT-LED GREAT DECISIONS GROUPS

INSTRUCTORS

An instructor's primary role is to act as a moderator. Discussion leaders need not be experts on the topic of the discussion. The measure of an instructor lies not in how much knowledge she or he possesses, but in the ability to draw the most out of each participant, and to keep the discussion fair and informative. To this end, the instructor's role should focus on three basic elements:

- Determining the format and duration of the meeting in cooperation with the coordinator and staff
- Preparing key points for discussion
- Keeping the discussion on track and fruitful

The ideal instructor would be someone who can keep the group focused on the objectives while allowing dialogue to run its course. Some of these objectives may include:

- Exploring an issue
- Understanding opposing viewpoints
- Making connections between various issues
- Gaining insight into the process of foreign affairs

Outlining objectives with students can help the instructor make the most out of these groups. Not only will it be useful for students to think about what they want from the instructor, but it also makes the leader's job easier.



COORDINATORS

A student group coordinator is responsible for the logistical and administrative elements of the discussion group.

A student group coordinator is responsible for:

- Promoting the group to the community
- Registering student participants
- Finding discussion leaders
- Arranging the place and time of discussions
- Securing outside speakers if desired
- Making sure the library or organization has the correct amount of *Great Decisions* briefing books and other materials

PART IV: STUDENT-LED GREAT DECISIONS GROUPS

- Assisting with audio/visual materials if needed
- Arranging for supplementary reading materials, either on or offline
- Communicating with group members
- Community outreach, which includes interacting with members of the press, business community, civic organizations, religious and educational institutions, and interested individuals

PROGRAM CHECKLIST

The following items should be in place before each meeting:

- ☐ Inform staff, any speakers and students of the location and time of the meeting.
- ☐ If you have a speaker, confirm the details, including the time, location and program format, with them a few days before the meeting.
- ☐ Post signs directing students to the meeting.
- ☐ Prepare the room for the meeting by setting up the right number of chairs, testing audio/visual equipment, and putting out materials. If you have one, make sure there is a chair or podium for the speaker.
- ☐ Make sure all students have their program materials and set up a form for any walk ins to order additional materials.
- ☐ Prepare your introduction and acknowledgements, and always make sure to include any private funders.
- ☐ Send out a reminder email to pre-registered guests.

PROGRAM FORMAT

There's no one way to format your discussion group nor is there a set length for discussion groups. On average, meetings last an hour and thirty minutes to two hours. This gives enough time for discussion, screening and/or a presentation.

Local Speakers and Lecture Series

Some groups, such as [UNC-Chapel Hill's Great Decisions program](#), kick off their meetings with a speaker, who presents for 45-60 minutes, which is followed by a 30-45 minute discussion. If your group chooses to incorporate a lecture series into a wider program, students usually prefer to attend the lecture first and then have a discussion. If you wish to hold a lecture series by itself, make sure to decide on an appropriate way to distribute materials to attendees (i.e., the briefing book and DVD).

PART IV: STUDENT-LED GREAT DECISIONS GROUPS

In either case, you'll need to find local speakers. Speakers can be the instructor or a guest speaker from the community. If you're looking for speakers off campus, a couple of good places to start include: think tanks, the Fulbright Alumni Association in Washington, D.C. to find local former Fulbright scholars, local organizations connected to the topic, Peace Corps volunteers, and elected officials (state, local and/or national). When you contact the speakers, make sure to bring them up to speed on the format of the lecture, the date/time/place/length, the size of the audience, and an honorarium (if you can provide one). If they accept, always make sure you confirm with the speaker.

Screenings

Other groups, such as the *Great Decisions* discussion group at the Aspen Institute in Colorado, start off the program with an episode from the television series, which is then followed by discussion.

If you want more detailed examples of how successful discussion groups have organized their meetings in the past, check out the descriptions of winners of the [Frank R. Cella Memorial Awards](#), an annual award recognizing the achievements of individual discussion groups.

PROMOTING YOUR GROUP

The Foreign Policy Association can provide the following professionally designed free promotional materials to your student group:

- Posters
- Bookmarks
- National Opinion Ballot Reports

To obtain promotional materials, email editorial@fpa.org.

PART IV: STUDENT-LED GREAT DECISIONS GROUPS

PROMOTING YOUR STUDENT GROUP

Here are some examples of how to promote your student group:

- Add an article announcing the formation of your *Great Decisions* group in your school newspaper. Here you can explain what *Great Decisions* is to students and other interested parties.
- Print flyers indicating the location, time, and cost (if applicable) of the program, and pair them with [free promotional materials](#) from the Foreign Policy Association. Put these wherever you traditionally advertise student programming, such as at your student center, library, gym, dining hall or in the dorms.
- Post an announcement on your school's web page and on online community boards.
- Make an announcement at other school-sponsored events when relevant.
- Start an event page on Facebook.
- Pass out flyers to students and faculty.

Finally, don't forget to add your information to the *Great Decisions* [group directory](#). This will not only add your group to the larger database, but it will also give you a web page to refer to. Make sure you include the name of the group leader(s), contact information, location (of the meetings and the city you're in), and how often your group will meet (weekly, biweekly, etc.).



PART V: ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

ONLINE MATERIALS

Groups can find additional information related to *Great Decisions* topics and discussion free of charge at www.GreatDecisions.org. This includes topic overviews, news stories, book recommendations, glossaries, television series trailers and transcripts and recommended organizations. Students and teachers can also subscribe to the *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* newsletter with program updates, news, events, blogs and other materials related to *Great Decisions*. *Great Decisions* is also active on social networks like [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/greatdecisions) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/greatdecisions).

SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

Group leaders are also encouraged to incorporate material, including op-eds and long-form articles, from the daily news cycle to start discussions and keep students up-to-date on the topics.

We also recommend the following sites for supplementary materials for your group:

- ForeignPolicyBlogs.com
- [Real Clear World](http://RealClearWorld.com)
- [Foreign Policy Passport](http://ForeignPolicyPassport.com)
- [Global Post](http://GlobalPost.com)
- [Fair Observer](http://FairObserver.com)



PART VI: ABOUT GREAT DECISIONS



HISTORY OF GREAT DECISIONS

Started in 1955 in Portland, Oregon, the *Great Decisions* Discussion Program was designed to facilitate participation in the democratic process through a grassroots approach to foreign affairs education. *Great Decisions* became a national program in 1957, and has been used by libraries, high schools, universities, community centers, faith-based organizations and retirement communities across the country.

Like the pilot program in Portland, the current *Great Decisions* briefing book and television show focus on eight critical issues facing American policymakers today. And with thousands of discussion groups across the country and 1.2 million viewers and counting tuning into *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* on PBS, it's truly the FPA's flagship program.

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1918, the mission of the Foreign Policy Association today, as it has been throughout its 95-year history, is to serve as a catalyst for developing awareness, understanding, and informed opinion on U.S. foreign policy and global issues. Through its balanced, nonpartisan programs and publications, the FPA encourages citizens to participate in the foreign policy process.

For more information on the history of the Foreign Policy Association, please visit our [“About”](#) page.

SAMPLE SCHEDULES

SAMPLE SCHEDULE: WITH SPEAKER

TOPIC: _____

I Welcome and Introduction *(10 minutes)*

- Introduction of discussion group leader and coordinator.
- Introduce topic and speaker.

II Presentation by Guest Speaker *(30 minutes)*

III Questions and Discussion *(45 minutes)*

If your group is more than 30 people, break up into smaller groups after the question and answer session with the speaker.

- Field any questions or comments to the speaker and open the room up for discussion.
- Allow fifteen minutes or so for questions for the speaker, and then move into the discussion questions.
- Give yourself at least ten minutes if you broke up into smaller groups to regroup and allow groups to present their discussions.

IV Wrap Up *(5 minutes)*

- Thank the participants and staff, but most importantly the speaker.
- Introduce next week's topic and speaker, and clarify the date, time and location.
- Make any other announcements as necessary.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE: NO SPEAKER

TOPIC: _____

I Welcome and Introduction *(10 minutes)*

- Introduction of discussion group leader and coordinator.
- Introduce topic.

II Screening of *Great Decisions in Foreign Policy* on PBS *(25 minutes)*

III Questions and Discussion *(45 minutes)*

If your group is more than 30 people, break up into smaller groups of five or six.

- Start off with reactions to the screening (5 minutes)
- Start out with the discussion questions.
- Give yourself at least ten minutes if you broke up into smaller groups to regroup and allow groups to present their discussions.

IV Wrap Up *(10 minutes)*

- Thank the participants and staff.
- Introduce next week's topic and clarify the date, time and location.
- Make any other announcements as necessary.



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