**5: Debating the Six Big Ideas in America Today**

More than 220 years after the ratification of the Constitution, the Six Big Ideas still inspire debate. Different understandings of how the Big Ideas should be manifested in the actions of the federal government often engender debates over what government should be doing in the name of the people it serves. Students will obtain an understanding of these current disputes by taking sides in a debate featuring current issues.

***The Debate Format:***

* Two teams will be assigned one of the scenarios described below. One team will argue for Position A and the other will argue for Position B.
* Each debate will have five participants on each side of the issue. Each participant will speak for no more than two minutes and teams will alternate speakers. Teams can use [Handout 4](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/resources/education/constitution/images/handout-4.pdf) to plan the arguments to be made during the debate. Encourage students to anticipate and respond to the arguments that could be made by the opposing team.
* Each team will choose a speaker to deliver the opening (an overview of the team's position).
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* Three speakers on each team should give supporting arguments—one argument per speaker.
* One speaker on each team should deliver the closing argument.

***The Debate Questions:***

1. The idea: Limited Government  
   Question: To what extent should the federal government be involved in economic issues?
   * Position A: The federal government's powers over taxation as well as international and interstate trade allow significant latitude in directing economic policy.
   * Position B: The federal government should only act to remedy unfavorable economic conditions for business activity.
2. The idea: Republicanism  
   Question: What should be the role of citizens in creating public policy?
   * Position A: Public policy should reflect the opinion of voters.
   * Position B: Public policy should be created by officials who are most informed about the issues involved.
3. The idea: Checks and Balances  
   Question: When the President makes a nomination, what should be the nature of the Senate's "advice and consent?"
   * Position A: The Senate should defer to the President's choice of who he wants working under him.
   * Position B: It is the Senate's duty to make an independent judgment of a nominee's suitability for a position serving the American people, even if that means denying the President his choice.
4. The idea: Federalism  
   Question: How should power be divided between the federal government and the states?
   * Position A: The Federal government should retain the most power because it is best positioned to insure fair treatment, safety and equal protection for all Americans.
   * Position B: The states should retain the most power because they are closer to the people, better informed on local issues and best positioned to exercise authority for their residents.
5. The idea: Separation of Powers  
   Question: Once Congress declares war and the President assumes the role of Commander-in-Chief who decides how the war ends?
   * Position A: Congress, the policy making branch which represents the people, should determine peace terms.
   * Position B: The President as Commander-in-Chief is in the best position to determine appropriate actions.
6. The idea: Popular Sovereignty  
   Question: Should voter ballot initiatives be allowed to overturn laws passed by legislative bodies?
   * Position A: Yes; ballot initiatives allow voters to directly participate in their government.
   * Position B: No; voters already express their views through election of public officials.