

**TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Larkspur, California**

**Course of Study**

**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Within the social studies program, the elective course in Contemporary Issues will complement and reinforce the knowledge of basic concepts acquired by students in World History, United States History, Government, and other social studies electives. In addition, the Contemporary Issues class reinforces and expands values analysis and skill development. This class is a general class which is designed to introduce students to a variety of perspectives concerning Contemporary Issues.

Among social studies classes, this class is unique in that: it allows more in-depth probing; it integrates virtually all of the social studies disciplines, rather than being oriented toward a single discipline; it develops analytical skills to a maximum; it promotes an understanding of other cultures and other points of view.

This class is intended for students who have completed World History and U.S. History.

**II. EXPECTATIONS**

**A. Objectives**

1. To develop student understanding of contemporary issues in an historical, cultural and environmental context. Students should be able to:
  - a. comprehend the important concepts and generalization related to contemporary issues;
  - b. comprehend the importance of informed citizen participation in the economic and political process;
  - c. make informed decisions about personal, national, and global issues;
  - d. analyze the consequences of decisions: for themselves, for our country, and for the world.
2. To foster student ability to view contemporary issues from a multiple perspective.
3. To develop student awareness of the global nature of most of the issues that affect our society.
4. To relate contemporary issues to current student concerns.

5. To develop student ability to deal effectively with conflict, change and ambiguity as part of the life experience.
6. To clarify values and to apply values to decisions about contemporary issues.
7. Since the essence of understanding lies in being able to make sense out of the unfolding array of contemporary issues coming to our attention, students should practice a reasoned approach to contemporary issues. Students should:
  - a. recognize that contemporary issues can be analyzed effectively by replacing emotional judgments with an objective, rational, and systematic approach – a reasoned approach;
  - b. know where and how to obtain evidence and how to evaluate it.
8. To demonstrate a commitment to the development of skills that will enable individuals to respond intelligently to local, national and international events and participate effectively at those levels.

## **B. Means**

### **1. Content**

- a. Teachers should select issues which are contemporary, issues which are important, and issues which will have an impact on the future of our society.
- b. Issues will be selected from current developments in various areas involving political, economic or social events.
- c. The individual teacher will decide the order and emphasis of presentation within the course of study.
- d. Method of study
  - 1) Setting the context. When dealing with a contemporary issue it is always tempting for students to focus on immediate happenings and to neglect the larger context, but few crises ignite full blown whether they be local, national, or global. Such considerations as history, culture, political rivalries, and prior geopolitical decisions may be less than obvious but will shed more light upon an issue and eventually lead to a more sophisticated level of understanding. Setting the context, is the first step in the study of controversial issues, and this first step involves a focus on skill development as well as on content.
  - 2) Understanding interconnectedness. A logical progression from setting the context is to examine the interconnectedness of the factors contributing to the conflict and how they may be tied to other issues.
  - 3) Conflict and conflict resolution. One thread of continuity through both the context and the interconnectedness of contemporary issues is that of conflict, i.e., two or more forces pursuing mutually incompatible goals. The daily process of conflict resolution is a normal process which can be handled in a constructive fashion on a personal interaction level. On the national and international level, conflict appears to be an increasing force in our civilization. Conflict and conflict resolution are areas where we can

help students to become more confident in making an impact on the world in which they live and in playing a significant role in the decision-making process at the local, national or international level.

- 4) Acquiring a multiple perspective. The skills of understanding the context, recognizing interconnectedness and dealing with conflict are enhanced if students can acquire a sense of “perspective consciousness.” Perspective consciousness implies that we recognize that others have different values and views of the world than our own.
- 5) Encouraging critical thinking. It is imperative that as students acquire a knowledge about contemporary issues, we also teach them to recognize opinions, assess reliability, compare values, analyze anticipated consequences, and evaluate information. Neither knowledge nor thinking skills stand well in isolation...together they provide the means for examining contemporary issues.

e. Concepts

Some key concepts which will help students to achieve course objectives are summarized in the list which follows: (These concepts will be included in many of the units of instruction.)

- a) Interdependence
- b) Conflict
- c) Conflict resolution
- d) Communication
- e) Education
- f) Quality of life

f. Possible areas of study and concept emphasis

Context setting, recognizing interconnectedness, conflict resolution, multiple perspectives, and critical thinking are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. We will have infused a set of teaching strategies in our course of study which will not only challenge students to learn but will better equip them as decision makers in an ever changing world. These teaching strategies will be applied to areas of study and to concepts selected from the following outline:

CONTENT	CONCEPTS
<b>1) Domestic issues (can be examined at the national, state and/or local level)</b>	
a. Economy	Budget
	Economic institutions
	Economic development
	Money
	Investment

	Consumption
	Markets
	Income distribution
	Unemployment
	Inflation-deflation
	Fiscal policy
	International monetary policy
	Balance of trade
b. Agriculture	Resources
	Land use
	Conservation
	Inventions and innovation
	World hunger
c. Technology	Technological change
	Automation
	Economic and social adjustment
d. Environment/Geography	
1) Natural	Resources
	Climatic cycles and changes
2) Man made	Pollution
	Land use
e. Social problems	Family relationships
	Poverty
	Health
	Discrimination
	Crime
	Drugs
	Aging
	Population control
f. Recreation	Leisure
	Resources
	Land use
	Cultural change
g. Transportation	Transportation systems
	Distribution of resources
h. Communication	Language
	Active listening
	Communication systems
	Information overload
	Technological change
	Futurism
i. Population	Distribution of population
	Immigration
	Urbanization
	Classes

	Minorities
	Population control
	Mobility
<b>2) Global issues (Students should have a general understanding of each issue as well as an understanding of the role and interests of the United States in relationship to each issue)</b>	
a. The Cold War	National self-interest
	Containment
	Coexistence
b. The arms race	Technological advancement
	Allocation of resources
	Competition
	National security
	Arms control
	Deterrence
	Survival
c. International alliances	Nation state systems
	Nationalism
	Power
	Sphere of influence
	National self-interest
	Mutual defense
	Cooperation
d. Third world nations	Economic development
	Economic problems
	Political problems
	Cultural identity
	Cultural preservation
e. International trade	Economic system
	Global marketplace
	Balance of trade
	Protectionism
	Debt crisis
f. Environment/Geography	Natural resources
	Conservation
	Pollution control
	Energy
g. Human rights	Identity
	Equality
	Self-determination
	Minority rights
	Equal opportunity
	Freedoms

h. Regional studies	
1) The Soviet Union	Culture
2) Europe	Cultural change
	Political system
	Social system
3) Latin America	Economic system
	World View
4) Asia	
5) The Middle East	
6) Africa	

## 2. Skills

### a. Introduction

1. The nature of this class is such that it emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills. Students will be required to probe and analyze issues in depth.
2. Students will also develop an understanding of and appreciation for different cultures and points of view.

### b. Study skills

1. Listening, observing, reading, writing, speaking
2. Locating, analyzing, organizing, evaluating information
3. Utilizing community resources

### c. Critical/creative thinking skills

1. Developing decision-making skills
2. Comparing similarities/differences
3. Classifying according to rational criteria
4. Detecting ethnocentricity and bias
5. Drawing inferences
6. Making defensible predictions
7. Making reasoned choices from among several alternatives
8. Formulating incisive questions
9. Evaluating worth
10. Synthesizing facts, principles and values

### d. Social participation skills

1. Understanding others' perspectives
2. Working effectively in groups
3. Giving, receiving constructive criticism
4. Developing and recognizing one's power of persuasion
5. Accepting responsibility
6. Respecting others' rights, opinions, property

7. Empathizing with others
8. Understanding and developing one's leadership abilities
9. Accepting opportunities and risks of participation

### 3. Suggested materials

In order to achieve objectives, the teacher and the students will use a variety of current materials and a variety of activities. The goal of the teacher is to constantly present a balanced presentation on any topic. Therefore, students will be encouraged to use a variety of materials presenting varied viewpoints.

#### a. Basic references

1. *Current Issues*, James Bruce, Close Up Foundation, Arlington, Virginia 1984
2. *Great Decisions*, Nancy Hoepli, Foreign Policy Association, New York, N.Y., 1984
3. *U.S. News and World Report* or *Time* or *Newsweek* or *Senior Scholastic Update*
4. *Close Up Special Focus Series*, Patricia Handy, Close Up Foundation, Arlington, Virginia, 1984

#### b. Supplementary materials

1. Periodicals
2. Newspapers
3. Supplementary books
4. Charts
5. Graphs
6. Films
7. Videotapes
8. Filmstrips
9. Television
10. Vocabulary lists
11. Speakers

### 4. Suggested Activities

- a. Teacher lecture
- b. Reading and analysis of primary and secondary sources
- c. Class discussion
- d. Guest speakers
- e. Oral presentations
- f. Simulations
- g. Films
- h. Attending community meetings
- i. Attending community workshops
- j. Group discussion and activities
- k. Interviews
- l. Debate

### 5. Evaluation

1. Tests
2. Student evaluation
3. Research projects
4. Written assignments
5. Class participation, involvement, cooperation

### **III. GENERAL VIEWPOINT**

This class is designed for students enrolled in grades eleven and twelve. This class satisfies the University of California entrance requirements. There are no prerequisites, nor are there any special services or materials required for students. This class is not restricted to college-bound students. This class is five units of credit.

BOT Approved: 5/14/85