

Teacher Guide / Worksheets for CT Environmental Rights Amendment

Lesson Title: Join the Legislative Debate on CT's Environmental Rights Amendment (SJR 36)

Grade Level(s): High School (Civics & Government, U.S. History)

Themes:

- Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens
 - Civic Engagement
 - Economic Prosperity and Equity
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Introduction for Teachers

This inquiry is built around the **C3 Framework (College, Career, and Civic Life)**, which emphasizes students doing the work of historians, political scientists, and engaged citizens.

The lesson asks students to analyze a current legislative debate — Connecticut's proposed Environmental Rights Amendment (SJR 36) — and decide for themselves whether they believe the state should adopt it.

New teachers should remember that **C3 inquiry** is student-centered. Instead of delivering information, your role is to frame the questions, provide authentic sources, guide analysis, and facilitate respectful debate. Students construct arguments and communicate conclusions through writing, discussion, and civic simulations.

Historical Background (for teacher and student use)

For over 50 years, the Connecticut General Assembly has passed laws to protect the state's land, air, water, and climate. Now, Connecticut is one of 16 states considering an environmental rights amendment to its state constitution. Three states (Montana, Pennsylvania, New York) have adopted such amendments, and four others include environmental protections elsewhere in their constitutions, though not in their bills of rights.

The proposed Connecticut Environmental Rights Amendment (SJR 36) is currently moving through the legislative process. In this inquiry, students will examine arguments for and against the amendment, evaluate the persuasiveness of each side, and develop their own conclusions.

Inquiry Structure

Compelling Question

Should Connecticut pass an amendment to its state constitution to protect the environmental rights of current and future residents?

(This question gives students a real-world problem to investigate and debate.)

Supporting Questions

1. **What does the proposed Connecticut Environmental Rights Amendment state and propose to do?**
2. **What arguments and evidence do proponents of the amendment offer, and are they persuasive?**
3. **What arguments and evidence do opponents of the amendment offer, and are they persuasive?**

(These questions help students to understand the issues, actively engage with the primary and secondary sources, and take a position on a real-world challenge facing Connecticut citizens.)

Key Sources (Toolkit)

- **Primary Source:** [Draft of the proposed amendment, Senate Joint Resolution No. 36.](#)
- **Supporting / Secondary Sources:**
 - [CT League of Conservation Voters' Environmental Rights Amendment Briefing Paper](#) (proponent view)
 - [Yankee Institute article: The Dangers of a "Green" Amendment](#) (opponent view)
 - [The Hill: National Push for "Green Amendments" Puts States at Forefront of Climate Fight](#) (informational)
 - [State Court Report: The Greening of State Constitutions](#) (informational)

Step-by-Step Teacher Guidance

Dimension 1: Developing Questions

- **Teacher Initiates:** Display the **compelling question** prominently. Ask students to rephrase it in their own words. What do they think “environmental rights” might mean in a constitutional sense?
- **Student Action:** In groups of 3–4, students unpack the compelling question, list key terms, and generate additional questions they want answered.

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts

- **Teacher Initiates:** Assign each small group one of the **supporting questions**. Provide the relevant sources. Remind students that their role is to act like lawmakers, weighing evidence and multiple perspectives.
- **Student Action:**
 - Read sources carefully.
 - Highlight claims, evidence, and reasoning.
 - Record findings on a shared chart (e.g., a pro/con T-chart or evidence matrix).
 - Discuss persuasiveness of arguments and note strengths/weaknesses.

Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence

- **Teacher Initiates:** Model how to evaluate a source: Who wrote it? What is their purpose? What evidence is used? Encourage students to consider perspective and credibility.
- **Student Action:**
 - Compare evidence from proponents and opponents.
 - Practice citing evidence when summarizing positions.
 - Identify where arguments conflict or overlap.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions

Three Levels of Student Activity (Teacher selects level or scaffolds upward):

1. **Introductory Level** (2 days): Written Testimony
 - Students write persuasive arguments (support or oppose).
 - Address counterarguments.
 - Submit as written testimony to share with the Teacher, Governor or General Assembly.
 2. **Intermediate Level** (1 day): Mock General Assembly Hearing
 - Students role-play as citizens, experts, advocates, or legislators.
 - Citizens/experts/advocates present oral testimony.
 - Legislators question presenters and deliberate.
 - Teacher moderates as committee chair.
 3. **Advanced Level** (1 day): Compromise Solution
 - All students role-play as legislators, either favoring, opposing, compromising, etc.
 - All students negotiate to draft revised amendment language that incorporates concerns from both sides until a consensus is reached.
 - Teacher and students send compromise proposal to the Connecticut General Assembly
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Differentiation Tips for New Teachers

- Provide sentence starters for students new to civic discourse (e.g., “*One strength of this argument is...*”).
- Offer graphic organizers (pro/con chart, evidence matrix).

- Allow oral responses or visual projects for students who struggle with formal writing.
- Extend research opportunities for advanced students by comparing with environmental rights amendments in other states.

Taking Informed Action (Beyond the Classroom)

- Write letters to legislators expressing informed opinions.
 - Create public service announcements or social media campaigns.
 - Partner with local organizations (e.g., CTLCV, Save the Sound) for student-led advocacy projects.
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Materials Checklist

- Text of CT Environmental Rights Amendment (SJR 36)
- Proponent and opponent articles/testimony
- Charts templates for evidence collection
- Teacher's Guide with specific instructions
- Student worksheets, charts, templates, role cards, reflection, and rubric

(Each worksheet, chart, etc. can be printed and distributed to students for the individual assignments)

Student Worksheets:

Connecticut's Environmental Rights Amendment (SJR 36)

1. Evidence Chart (Supporting Questions Organizer)

Name: _____

Group: _____

Supporting Question: _____

Document	Claim / Argument	Evidence	View / Bias	Persuasiveness
SJR 36 (State ERA Amendment)				
CT League of Conservation Voters (Proponent)				
Yankee Institute (Opponent)				
The Hill Article (Informational)				
State Court Report Article (Informational)				

Reflection Prompt: Based on your chart, which argument(s) seem strongest? Why?

2. Pro/Con Organizer for the Compelling Question

Compelling Question: *Should Connecticut pass an amendment to its state constitution to protect the environmental rights of current and future residents?*

Arguments For the Amendment	Arguments Against the Amendment

Next Step: Circle the side you find more persuasive right now. Identify evidence from the sources that supports your view. Include at least 3 pieces of persuasive evidence.

3. Written Testimony Template (Introductory Level)

Name: _____

Date: _____ Role (if applicable): _____

Opening Statement:

I believe Connecticut should / should not adopt the Environmental Rights Amendment because...

Evidence Supporting My Position:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Counterargument & Rebuttal:

Some people argue that:

However, I respond that:

Closing Statement:

Therefore, I urge legislators to:

4. Mock General Assembly Role Cards (Intermediate Level)

Teacher moderates the testimony as the General Assembly committee chair to:
Open and close the hearing. / Recognize speakers. / Ensure respectful discourse.

Cut cards apart prior to the hearing. Have each group discuss their goals & strategies.

Role: Proponent (Citizen/Expert/Advocate)

- Present reasons to support the amendment.
- Cite at least 2 pieces of evidence.
- Respond respectfully to questions.

Role: Opponent (Citizen/Expert/Advocate)

- Present reasons to oppose the amendment.
- Cite at least 2 pieces of evidence.
- Respond respectfully to questions.

Role: Legislator

- Ask probing questions of witnesses.
- Listen for strong evidence.
- Decide whether to support, oppose, or amend the proposal.

5. Compromise Negotiation Worksheet (Advanced Level)

Group Members: _____

Step 1: Identify Key Concerns of Proponents & Rank them in order of importance

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Step 2: Identify Key Concerns of Opponents & Rank them in order of importance

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Step 3: Draft Compromise Language

(How could the amendment be revised to address both sets of concerns? Try to include the top concerns and areas of common interest.)

Step 4: Present the compromise proposal to each side separately & identify (1) what they agree with (2) what they don't like, but can live with, and (3) what is unacceptable as written.

Step 5: Return to your negotiation group and create a revised compromise that should appeal to both sides. To pressure them to be reasonable then go to a binding vote in step 6. (The teacher, acting as the governor, could speak with both sides and urge them to reach a fair compromise.)

Step 6: If no compromise or consensus is reached, then have the students cast open (or secret ballots) on the revised compromise to come up with the final bill.




Student Self-Check Rubric

Inquiry: *Should Connecticut pass an amendment to its state constitution to protect the environmental rights of current and future residents?*









Name: _____

Date: _____




How Did I Do?

-  = I did this assignment really well
-  = I did okay on this assignment, but could improve
-  = I need more work here

CIRCLE ONE RATING FOR EACH OF THE 5 CRITERIA

<u>Criteria</u>	 <u>Strong</u>	 <u>Okay</u>	 <u>Needs Work</u>
Use of Evidence 	I used 3+ strong facts and even responded to the other side.	I used 1–2 good facts.	I used little or no evidence.
Perspectives 	I explained BOTH sides fairly.	I explained both sides a little.	I only focused on ONE side.
My Arguments 	Clear, logical, and convincing.	Mostly clear, a little weak.	Confusing or missing.
Communication 	Clear, organized, and respectful.	Mostly clear, a few issues.	Hard to understand or off-task.
Collaboration 	Listened, shared, and worked well with my group.	Worked with my group most of the time.	Had trouble working with others.

My Reflection

-  **Two things I did really well:** _____
-  **Two things I can improve:** _____
-  **If I had more time, I would:** _____