

Spectrum of Thought: 20th and 21st

Century Thinkers

Grade Levels: 10, 11

Time Commitment: 90 Minutes

Subject(s): U.S. History, Democracy

Overview: In this 90-minute graffiti-style lesson, students will work with partners to recode the core ideas of prominent 20th- and 21st-century economic and political thinkers (Theodore Roosevelt, FDR, Friedman, Reagan, and Sanders). They will then rank the thinkers based on the level of government involvement in the economy that they promote. Finally, students will make arguments to explain which thinker they most agree with and least

Materials:

- Student Handouts
- Smartboard or Projector
- 5 different colored markers
- Printer
- 5 Poster Boards

Opener (15 Minutes):

1. Distribute the Student Handout (Pages 8-9) to students and project the Slideshow (Pages 10- 17) on the board.
2. Do a Think-Pair-Share, using the Slideshow (Pages 10-16) and Student Handouts (Pages 8-9).
 - a. Think: Tell students to take a couple of minutes to respond to the first question on their Student Handout (Pages 8-9) (“How involved do you think the government is in the economy? Do you think that it should be more or less involved? Why?”).
 - b. Pair: Tell students to turn and share their responses with their neighbors (this serves as scaffolding for the “share” phase).
 - c. Share: Students will then share their responses with the class.

Activity (60 Minutes):

1. Make sure there are five posters with quotes attached, one quote per poster, using the quotes from the Poster Quotes (Pages 3-7).
2. Divide the students into five groups. Each group will receive a poster with different quotes.
3. Set a timer for nine minutes. During this time, each group will:
 - a. Work together to read and analyze the quote.
 - b. Summarize the thoughts of the thinker in their colored marker in 15 words on the poster (each group will have a different colored marker).
 - c. Individually write their group’s 15-word summary on their Student Handout (Pages 8-9).
4. Have students pass posters to the next group. Repeat Step 3 four times.
5. Then, when all groups have written on their posters, have students go back to their individual desks.
6. On their Student Handout (Pages 8-9), students should indicate where they think each thinker stands on the scale of less vs. more government involvement.

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Closer (15 Minutes):

1. Students should fill out the reflection questions at the bottom of the Student Handout (Pages 8-9). This can be done in a Think-Pair-Share style or separately.
2. Do a “3 Hot Takes” Exit Ticket. On scratch paper (or even in small groups), students should finish these statements:
 - a. "The most important idea today was..."
 - b. "I disagree with my group on..."
 - c. "I was surprised that..."

Tips & Tricks for the Activity

- Make sure that each poster has a quote taped to it before the activity begins.
- It may be helpful to select groups before the lesson. It may also be helpful to organize the desks into 5 groups before the class.
- Use the Rubric (Page 18) to evaluate your students on this activity.

Extension Activity Ideas

- Add additional quotes for groups to analyze; consider Calvin Coolidge, George Marshall, and/or Lyndon Johnson.
- Print out the quotes for each student so they can annotate as they visit each poster.

Modified Activity Ideas

- It may be helpful to scaffold vocabulary knowledge, depending on the academic level of students and prior course sequence.
- Suggested vocabulary could include monopoly, trusts, corporations, enterprise, industry, public works, inflation, embargoes, and paternalistic.
 - This may be done through the [20th Century Economy Vocabulary Sheet](#) or another cheat sheet.
 - Provide it to the students the day before or the day of.

Spectrum of Thought: 20th and 21st Century Thinkers

Poster Quote

Name: _____

Block: _____

<u>Background</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Theodore Roosevelt Message to Congress December 2nd, 1902	“I discussed at length the question of the regulation of those big corporations...often with some tendency to monopoly, which are popularly known as trusts...A fundamental base of civilization is the inviolability of property; but this is in no wise inconsistent with the right of society to regulate the exercise of the artificial powers which it confers upon the owners of property...in such a way as to prevent the misuse of these of these powers. Corporations, and especially combinations of corporations, should be managed under public regulation...I believe that monopolies...which prevent or cripple competition, fraudulent overcapitalization, and other evils in trust organizations and practices which injuriously affect interstate trade can be prevented under the power of the Congress to ‘regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the several States.’”
Theodore Roosevelt was the 22nd president of the United States. He served as president during a time of high concentration of wealth in a small number of businessmen, often called “Robber Barons.”	

<u>Background</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Franklin Delano Roosevelt, September 30th 1934 Fireside Chat FDR was the 32nd president of the United States. He came into power during the depth of the Great Depression. Having been elected to an unprecedented 4 terms, he served until his death towards the end of WWII.	“We are bringing order out of the old chaos with a greater certainty of the employment of labor at a reasonable wage and of more business at a fair profit...private enterprise in times such as these cannot be left without assistance and without reasonable safeguards lest it destroy not only itself but also our processes of civilization...Our first problem was, of course, the banking situation because...the banks had collapsed...Some banks could not be saved but the great majority of them, either through their own resources or with government aid, have been restored to complete public confidence...In meeting the problems of industrial recovery, the chief agency of the government has been the National Recovery Administration. Under its guidance, trades and industries covering over ninety percent of all industrial employees have adopted codes of fair competition, which have been approved by the President. Under these codes, in the industries covered, child labor has been eliminated. The work day and the work week have been shortened. Minimum wages have been established and other wages adjusted toward a rising standard of living...with the confidence that we are definitely rebuilding our political and economic system on the lines laid down by the New Deal...the program of Public Works...designed to put more men back to work, both directly on the public works themselves, and indirectly in the industries supplying the materials for these public works. To those who say that our expenditures for Public Works...waste that we cannot afford, I answer that no country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources. Demoralization caused by vast unemployment is our greatest extravagance...we must make it a national principle that we will not tolerate a large army of unemployed”

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Poster Quote

Name: _____

Block: _____

<u>Background</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Franklin Delano Roosevelt, September 30th 1934 Fireside Chat	
Ronald Reagan was the 40th president of the United States, serving during the bulk of the 1980's. Two of his primary goals were to reduce inflation and renew economic growth, after the stagnation of the 1970's.	“I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help. A great many of the current problems on the farm were caused by government-imposed embargoes and inflation, not to mention government's long history of conflicting and haphazard policies. Our ultimate goal, of course, is economic independence for agriculture, and through steps like the tax reform bill, we seek to return farming to real farmers. But until we make that transition, the Government must act compassionately and responsibly.”

<u>Background</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Milton Friedman, The Role of Government (1955)	“In such a free private enterprise exchange economy, government's primary role is to preserve the rules of the game by enforcing contracts, preventing coercion, and keeping markets free. Beyond this, there are only three major grounds on which government intervention is to be justified. One is "natural monopoly"...which makes effective competition (and therefore thoroughly voluntary exchange) impossible. A second is the existence of substantial "neighborhood effects," i.e., the action of one individual imposes significant costs on other individuals for which it is not feasible to make him compensate them or yields significant gains to them for which it is not feasible to make them compensate him...The third... paternalistic concern for children and other irresponsible individuals.”
Milton Friedman was a prominent economist, serving as a professor at the University of Chicago. He was a member of the Chicago School of economic thought, which promoted free enterprise.	

<u>Background</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Bernie Sanders Address to Congress, June 1st, 2026	“The question then is not whether AI will change the world. It will. The question is who will own and control the future? Who will benefit from AI, and who will be hurt by it? Will AI be used to make life better for working families?...Will it help us eliminate poverty, extend life expectancies, and help us solve the climate crisis? Or will the future of humanity be determined by a handful of some of the wealthiest people on the planet who have promoted and developed AI with no democratic input in order for them to become even richer and more powerful than they are today?...It was not a brilliant idea that just popped into Mark Zuckerberg's head or Elon Musk's imagination. The foundation of AI is our collective human intelligence...Our books, songs, artwork, journalism, computer code, scientific research, videos, conversations, images, and ideas spanning generations. It is our tweets, our Facebook posts, our TikTok videos, our Reddit comments...The reality is that big tech oligarchs have fed this knowledge into their AI models without permission, without acknowledgement, and without compensation...Since AI is built on the collective knowledge of humanity, the wealth it generates must benefit humanity...in the coming weeks, I will be introducing the American AI Sovereign Wealth Fund Act. This legislation would give the public a ownership stake in the largest AI companies in our country...Through a one-time 50% tax (on) the stock. If passed, this legislation would do two critical things. First, it would give the American people a direct role in determining the future of this technology...Under this bill, the federal government would have the power, through its voting shares and an equal representation on each company's board, to block decisions that hurt the public and to push for policies that help them. Secondly, this legislation would guarantee that the trillions of dollars potentially created by AI are used to improve the lives of all of us, not simply to make the richest people in the world.”
Bernie Sanders is a United States senator from Vermont and former presidential candidate. Self labeled as a democratic socialist, he positions himself against wealth business leaders in the United States.	

Spectrum of Thought: 20th and 21st Century Thinkers

Name: _____

Block: _____

Student Handout

Worksheet: 20th and 21st Century Spectrum of Thought Government Involvement in the Economy

Step 1: Opening/Access Prior Knowledge: Think-Pair-Share

1. How involved do you think the government is involved the economy? Do you think that it should be more or less involved? Why?

Step 2: Graffiti Summaries:

Write your group's 15-word summary under each political and economic leader's Quote

- Theodore Roosevelt:

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt:

- Ronald Reagan:

- Milton Friedman:

- Bernie Sanders:

Spectrum of Thought: 20th and 21st Century Thinkers

Student Handout

Name: _____

Block: _____

Worksheet: 20th and 21st Century Spectrum of Thought Government Involvement in the Economy

Step 3: Spectrum of Political Thoughts

Draw a line from your summary of each political/economic thinker's quote to where you think it would be in terms of more or less government involvement.



Theodore Roosevelt Franklin Delano Roosevelt Ronald Reagan

Milton Friedman Bernie Sanders

Step 4: Reflection Questions

Please respond to the following questions in multiple complete sentences.

1. Which political/economic thinker do you think supports the most government involvement? Why?

1. Which political/economic thinker do you think supports the least government involvement? Why?

1. Which political/economic thinker do you most agree with? Why?

1. Which political/economic thinker do you least agree with? Why?

20th/21st Century Spectrum of Thought Government Involvement in the Economy

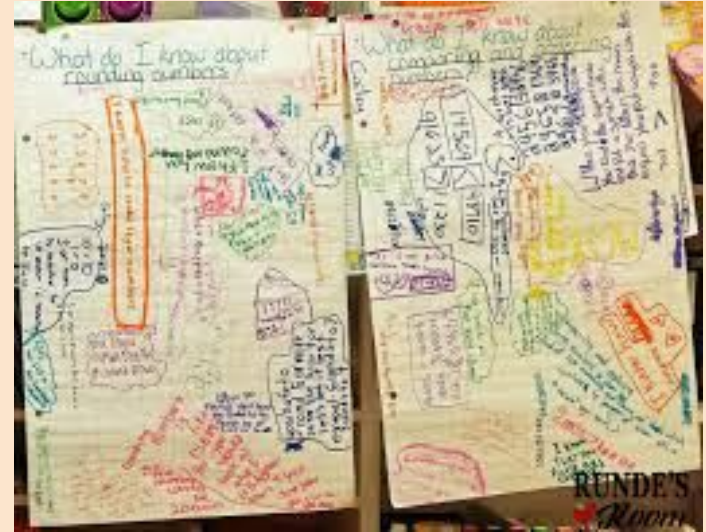
Step 1: Opening/Access Prior Knowledge

Think/Pair/Share

Question: How involved do you think that the government is involved in the economy? Do you think that it should be more or less involved? Why?

Step 2: Graffiti

- Divide into 5 groups
- Each group will be given a poster with quotes from prominent 20th/21st century economic and political thinkers.
- 9 minutes for each poster:
 - Each group will work together to read and analyze the quote.
 - The group summarize the thoughts of the thinker in 15 words on the poster (each group will have a different colored marker)
 - The student should write their group's 15 word summary on their worksheet.
- At the end of 9 minutes, the posters will be rotated.



9:00

Step 3: Spectrum of Political Thought

- On your worksheet, indicate where you think each thinker stands on the scale of less vs. more government involvement.





Step 4: Reflection Questions

1. Which political/economic thinker do you think supports the most government involvement? Why?
2. Which political/economic thinker do you think supports the least government involvement? Why?
3. Which political/economic thinker do you most agree with? Why?
4. Which political/economic thinker do you least agree with? Why?



Think-Pair-Share

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Rubric - Graffiti Activity

Name: _____

Block: _____

	Student does not complete this category			Student Mostly Meets Expectations		Student Fully Meets Expectations
Category	0	1	2	3	4	5
The successful student effectively works with partners to make thoughtful summaries of 20th and 21st century American political and economic thinkers.						
The Successful student makes a reasonable ranking of political and economic thinkers from favoring less government involvement to favoring more government involvement.						
The successful student makes convincing explanations for their rankings in their reflection questions.						
The successful student actively contributes to class discussion during think-pair-share activities.						

This Lesson Plan was:

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