Essential Questions about the War with Iraq

The Middle East and the Current Crisis

- What is the history of the U.S. Government’s relationship with the governments’ of the Middle East? Why has the relationship between the U.S. government and governments in the Arab and Muslim world been challenging for all the parties involved? How has economics played a part in this history? How has culture played a part in this history? What might be different interpretations of this history from different points of view?
- What role does culture, government, and religion play in these situations? In what ways have differences in culture, political philosophies, and religion exacerbated tensions? How can we work with cultural, political, and religious diversity to find solutions?
- Through the U.S. military intervention in Iraq, what future should residents of the U.S. hope to shape there? In the rest of the Middle East? In the world? What future do we hope to shape here in the U.S.? In the aftermath of this intervention, what responsibility, if any, does the U.S. government have to rebuild Iraq?
- What is the role of the Israeli/Palestinian dispute in the politics of the Middle East?

Threats to World Order, National and International Responses

- What are the causes of terrorism? What are ways to address the causes? What are different theories about ways to counter terrorism effectively?
- What are weapons of mass destruction? How can we create a safer world in which the threat from such weapons is minimized?
- What have we learned from history and international relations that will help us better understand current conflicts around the globe? What is the role of diplomacy, international institutions like the U.N., and international coalitions in preventing war or intervening to address injustice?
- What is the history of nonviolent efforts to repel invasions and overthrow repressive governments?

Ethical Issues and International Crises

- How do we address the ethical dilemmas involved in war situations? For example, is it appropriate to intervene preemptively and how do we determine if that point is reached? Is there a level of threat that is so great that military preemption is justified, and if so what is that level of threat?
- When is it appropriate for a nation to use military force? What is the appropriate justification for declaring war?
- Are there times when oppression and injustice rise to the level of a humanitarian crisis that justifies military intervention by another country in order to alleviate such suffering? When?
- What are nonviolent alternatives to warfare for solving disputes? What nonviolent methods exist for countering repression and injustice? How have people overthrown dictators and repelled military occupations nonviolently and what can we learn from these examples?
- What is security? How can people or countries work to protect or increase security?
What are strategic interests? What are ethical ways for governments to pursue strategic interests?

What are the requirements of the laws of war (the Geneva Convention, etc.)? What are war crimes? What dilemmas arise when trying to implement the laws of war? Should the laws of war be changed?

In recent decades we have entered a new period in the history of warfare. Powerful modern weapons have led to an increase in the percentage of civilian casualties in twentieth century wars. Yet, precision-guided munitions might create the potential to decrease civilian casualties in war. As the U.S. Government and the Iraqi Government wage war, what is their responsibility to innocent bystanders?

The U.S. Role in the World

How can individual citizens in the U.S. respond in times of crisis or war? How does a democratic government respond in times of crisis or war? What is the meaning of patriotism? What is the role of dissent in times of crisis or war? How is American power interpreted around the world?

What is the history of U.S. foreign policy and how is it interpreted by historians with different points of view?

As the preeminent superpower, what role should the United States play in the world?

How is the U.S. role as the world’s sole superpower interpreted by people with varying perspectives around the world?

How might the U.S. move forward with a commitment to confront injustice while also promoting compassion and civility?

How should U.S. citizens balance their role as citizens of a nation-state with their responsibilities toward the world community, especially in relation to the international institutions designed to manage conflict and promote understanding among nations?

Please send comments about these questions or the guide as a whole, or e-mail inquiries about reprinting rights, to: educators@esrnational.org

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