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EXECUTIVE COMMISSION

Grades: 6 and up

Time: 40-60 minutes to a week

Materials: black/white board and chalk/markers

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies and Language Arts

This activity can be used in conjunction with any issue that you are discussing, debating, or assessing, from free trade, to environmental regulations to genetic engineering of crops to proposed legislation.

1. Pick an issue to debate and create a commission to advise the President/Prime Minister. For example, you might create a commission around this question: Should genetically engineered foods be required to be labeled as such?
2. Divide the class into two equal groups. One group's job is to think of all the reasons why it is good to require that genetically engineered foods be labeled as such (the "pros"), while the other group's job is to think of all the reasons against creating legislation requiring the labeling of genetically engineered foods (the "cons"). Each group should think of as many reasons as possible (whether or not they personally agree with the reasons), considering such issues as human health and well-being, animal suffering, the environment, and the economy. To turn this into a longer project, have students research the pros and cons as homework before proceeding to the next step.
3. Have a representative from each group list the pros and cons and write these down in two columns on the blackboard. When the lists are complete, ask the students to vote, explaining that they may vote how they truly feel, not based on the group's assignment.
4. Tally the votes and ask the students to write a letter to the President/Prime Minister expressing their opinion on the issue. Put the appropriate address on the board. Copy these letters to students' representatives as well. (Letters can also be written to city council members, state legislators, CEOs of corporations, etc.)
5. When students receive responses from their elected officials, revisit the topic and discuss the role of citizen letters in creating change.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*