Bringing the Debate to the Classroom

World on Trial: French Headscarf Law
Setting the Tone

• Serious issues deserve serious discussion...
• ...but they’re still Middle and High School students!
• Discussion should be open and honest, not necessarily somber
• Encourage alternate points of view, playing “Devil’s advocate”
Lesson Overview

- Introductory discussion
- Research
- Watch the episode
- In-depth discussion
- Vote!
Introductory Discussion

• You know your students
  – I hope!

• Some classes may have a lot of relevant background knowledge

• Some classes may have little knowledge or awareness of other cultures
  – Perhaps even hostility

• Guide discussion, no right or wrong answers
  – Point out even adult experts don’t agree
Introductory Discussion (cont’d)

• Can use “Background” section of lesson plan
  – Author comes highly recommended!
• Use any or all suggested questions as appropriate for your class
• “Why do we have freedom of religion?”
  – What associated freedoms are required?
• “What is the difference between freedom of religion and freedom from religion?”
  – At what point does a religious activity transition from private to public?
Introductory Discussion (cont’d)

• “How much responsibility does the government have to protect citizens from oppression?”
  – Generally gets enthusiastic affirmative response, possibly tempered by privacy concerns

• “Can a person oppress herself?”
  – Who gets to decide whether an action is truly voluntary?
  – Is denying that action a different sort of oppression?
“Are there other cases in which school students are denied rights?”
- Dress codes, inappropriate language, truancy, etc.

“When is it justifiable to limit students rights?”
- Safety, limit distractions, benefit society, etc.
Research

- Provides avenue for assessment
- Gives students more specific context
- Vocabulary
- Can also be adjusted based on student background
  - Even students familiar with subject can benefit from putting ideas into words
Articles

• Used with Research Guide
• “Why do Muslim Women Wear the Hijab?”
  – Offers religious perspective on issue
• “France Bans Headscarves in Schools”
  – Basic factual account of law’s passage
• “Q+A: Muslim Headscarves”
  – Combines justification and French ban
Viewing

• Watch “World on Trial”
• Exact timing depends on your schedule
• Closing arguments begin at 39 minutes
Reaction Discussion

• Give students opportunity to discuss, ask questions
• Can be a sensitive topic, keep the peace!
• Prompt as necessary:
  – Does the law specifically target Muslim girls?
  – If “Law of the Brothers” is a major concern, why regulate female behavior
  – Does the policy solve any specific problem?
Reaction Discussion (cont’d)

– Should the government also address headscarves outside of schools?

– The only jury in favor of the law was from a majority-Muslim country. Is that surprising?
  • Turkey (like France) has secularity written into constitution

• Encourage debate and discussion

• Students should do most of the talking!

• If appropriate for specific class, discussion can branch out to include other social/political regulation of male-female interaction
Vote!

- Allow students to vote at the “World on Trial” website

- Thank you!