LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: A 2020 VISION FOR 2070

INTRODUCTION

One need only to turn on the nightly news or open a newspaper to be reminded that the United States is currently facing a vast number of complex issues. Yet bright spots and success stories abound, especially when we consider the progress that’s been made in the past 50 years. But what will the next 50 years hold? Though we can’t know for sure, we can make predictions based on current trends and facts. This type of evidence-based predicting can help us see where we’re on the right path, where we may need to readjust, and where we may have major challenges to overcome. And while predictions are not perfect, they are valuable to glimpse where we might be headed so we can more effectively plan for the brightest future possible.

MATERIALS

• Essay Planning Sheet (provided)

PROCEDURE

1. Read the following paragraph aloud to students:

   Predictions are a part of our everyday life. Experts predict short-term events like weather patterns, the stock market, or the severity of the seasonal flu. They also make longer-term predictions to help with future planning in military spending, politics, and urban planning. In 1964, the RAND corporation conducted a study where they asked 82 experts from six different fields to make predictions as far as 50 years in the future – out to 2014. Their predictions centered around six general topics: scientific breakthroughs, population growth, automation, space progress, probability and prevention of war, and future weapon systems. Some of their predictions turned out to be fairly accurate. For example, they predicted “the eventual abundance of resources of energy, food, and raw materials, but also the possibility that a continuing inequitable world distribution of these assets to the increasing world population may furnish a persisting stimulant to warfare.” Some of their predictions, however, turned out to be wildly inaccurate. Below is a list of some of the predictions made, along with the earliest year that experts thought they would be achieved.

CONCEPT

Learning about issues faced by Americans today can help us predict the future and develop plans for improvement.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

• Conduct research using reputable sources that represent a variety of perspectives.

• Synthesize research to develop three logical predictions, or claims, about the future of a specific topic in America.

• Write an essay that clearly explains their predictions, outlines researched evidence to support their claims, and discusses possible ways to achieve improvement in their chosen topic area.

SUBJECTS

Social Studies, U.S History, English Language Arts

SKILLS

Researching, synthesizing research, identifying trends, critical thinking, writing, defending a claim with evidence

METHOD

After conducting research on one specific environmental, social, or demographic topic in America, students write an essay about predictions for their topic in the year 2070 and support their claims with logical evidence.
1980 – Robots as household servants
1980 – Man landing on Mars
1999 – Human lives artificially extended by 50 years
1999 – A military force on the moon
2015 – Two-way communication with extra-terrestrials
2015 – Long-duration coma to permit a form of time travel
2020 – Breeding of intelligent animals, like apes, for low-grade labor

2. In pairs, have students discuss the following questions and then share out:

   a. Is it valuable to make predictions about the future in America?

      Answers will vary. If students say no, explain how predictions can help us plan for the future. They can also shed light on potential challenges ahead and help identify areas for improvement.

   b. A prediction is essentially a claim someone makes about the future. What might impact the accuracy of a prediction?

      Answers may include: the length of time being predicted, the variability of the topic being predicted, how much historic data is available, and if the prediction is based upon current reliable evidence and trends. Predictions based on evidence, data, and research will most likely be more accurate than guesses, which tend to be based on emotion or intuition.

3. Explain to students that they will be responsible for making predictions, or claims, about a particular topic in America in 2070. Also share that their predictions must be based on research that they conduct and must be supported by evidence.

4. Display the chart below and ask students to write down the topic, from the left column, they are most interested in exploring. The right column of the chart lists ideas for specific issues that could be researched within each topic. Be sure students understand that for this assignment, they are focusing solely on issues within the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Ideas for issues to explore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>achievement gap, college attendance, access to early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Diet</td>
<td>life expectancy, medical advances, diet and food supply, farming practices, mental health, vaccinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>transportation, social media, internet, Artificial Intelligence (AI), communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>energy use and sources, water supply, climate change impacts, soil health, biodiversity and wildlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families and Housing</td>
<td>affordable housing, family size, urbanization, cost of childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>cost of living, gender pay gap, job market, wealth gap, atomization, middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>international and domestic migration, increasing elderly population/dependency ratio, population growth rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Allow students time to conduct research on various issues within their topic and emphasize that they must use reputable sources. Their goal is to get an accurate picture of trends, data, and challenges currently faced in America within their particular topic area. Tell students that they should refrain from making any predictions at this point; predictions should only be made after they have fully completed their research.
NOTE: Be sure students understand that they are researching the current state of American issues in order to make predictions for the future. These should be unique predictions and students should resist researching predictions made by experts.

If students need guidance on finding reliable information sources, they can check out this list of reliable and credible sources and this cheat sheet on fact-finding, both from Common Sense Media.

6. Once their research is complete, distribute the Essay Planning Sheet to each student. Based on the information they found, students should make three predictions related to their topic area, and support these claims with at least eight (total) pieces of evidence. Students can decide how to distribute their eight pieces of evidence between the three claims, and some evidence might support multiple claims.

7. Using their Essay Planning Sheet as a guide, students write an essay explaining their three predictions, or claims, for America in 2070, and explain how evidence supports their thinking. They should also include at least one idea to bring about improvement within their chosen topic area in the coming years.

8. If time permits, ask students to share their predictions and evidence with classmates so all students acquire broader knowledge of the state of these issues in the U.S.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How confident are you in your predictions?

   Some students may feel like their predictions were easy to develop, especially if they were based on long-standing trends and historic context. However, if the current data isn't clear-cut, there are multiple valid perspectives on an issue, or they think policies and/or public opinion will change on an issue, it may be harder for students to be confident in their predictions.

2. What challenges did you encounter when trying to research your topic?

   Answers will vary. Students may note the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation online as well as the fact that there can be bias in information sources and/or articles. In addition, many of the issues facing America today are complex, with multiple angles and perspectives.

3. Before starting your research, did you have an idea of what your predictions would be? Did your research back up that idea?

   Even though students are instructed to base their predictions on their research and evidence, many of them may go into the assignment with a preconceived idea of the state of their topic and where it may be headed in the future. It may be interesting to see if any student's research changed their original thinking. You can discuss with students the power of confirmation bias, or the tendency to seek out and interpret new information that confirms our existing beliefs, and the challenge of conducting research that is free of our own bias.

4. Have a few students share the things they thought might change their predicted outcome and what could be done to ensure improvement in their topic area. What do you think is the likelihood of these things happening? Why?

   Answers will vary.
5. If the class has shared their predictions, ask students in which ways they feel hopeful for the future of America and in what areas they foresee the biggest challenges.

*Answers will vary.*

**ASSESSMENT**

Review students’ Planning Sheets and essays to assess whether predictions are logical, based on evidence from reputable sources, and include at least one idea for improvement in their chosen topic area.

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY**

Ask students to read the following poem and write down their initial reflections. Then they should consider the following question: How much control do we have in changing the future? Do you agree with the author’s approach to bringing about change?

*I Wanted To Change The World*

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world.
I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation.
When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family.

Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.

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ESSAY PLANNING SHEET

Name: __________________________________________ Date: ________________

My topic: __________________________________________

My predictions for 2070 are...

1. ______________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________

My supporting evidence is….

1. ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

2. ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

What could happen that would change your predicted outcomes?

What could be done to help your topic area see improvement in the coming decades?