

Understanding Modern Germany

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Topic: Major issues that are currently shaping German society

Intended Course/Grade Level: World Geography. Cultural Geography/Grades 9-12

Lesson Description: This lesson will be placed within the context of a larger unit on Europe as a geographical region. The unit will include instruction on the continent's physical geography, brief historical background, an exploration of culture and political systems, and also a look at modern issues within the continent. This lesson will make use of German as a case study for six major issues that are currently shaping the country and is inspired by a discussion my TOP group had with Mr. Daniel Szabó de Bucs during his lecture on "Germany Today". These issues include the following:

1. Demographic shifts and an aging population
2. Modern family policy's efforts to address an aging population
3. Immigration and integration
4. Educational reforms
5. Addressing changes in the distribution of wealth
6. Germany's self-image and standing in the world

Objectives

- Students will examine six major issues impacting Germany today and how these issues may shape Germany's future.
- Students will propose their own policy plans to address these issues in ways that lead to productivity, harmony, and prosperity.
- Students will explore the applicability of these same issues to the rest of Europe and also the United States.
- Students will identify similarities and differences in how these issues impact Germany, other European states, and the United States.

Basic Background: *The following is a very brief discussion of the six major issues facing Germany from a blog entry I composed while participating in Goethe's TOP. It is far from a detailed, fact/data-based summary, but instead provides a basic idea of my thoughts in regards to the topics that Mr. Daniel Szabó de Bucs introduced during his lecture on "Germany Today" in Berlin on July 5, 2010.*

Posted on Thursday, July 8, 2010 at

[http://web.me.com/kevin.witte/Kevin Wittes Course Corner/TOP Germany Blog/Entries/2010/7/8 Bamberg%2C Munich%2C and Germany Today.html](http://web.me.com/kevin.witte/Kevin+Wittes+Course+Corner/TOP+Germany+Blog/Entries/2010/7/8+Bamberg%2C+Munich%2C+and+Germany+Today.html)

The following are the six major issues facing Germany in the 21st Century during our discussion yesterday:

Demography

Germany is an aging country. Birth rates have lowered steadily throughout the country and absolutely plummeted in the eastern part of Germany since the fall of communism. Unless, immigration or the birth rate increases, Germany's population will age and grow steadily smaller throughout this century, which could put pressure on the number of workers supporting each pensioner (retiree).

Modern Family Policy

Germany's low birth rate, as mentioned above, could be the major challenge of the upcoming decades. As a result, the government has tried to encourage the expansion of families and provide incentives for having children. With the fall of communism in East Germany, the birth rate plummeted as economic uncertainty and state-provided pre-school was no longer fully funded. In order to reverse this trend, the government has tried to expand support for day care, and also allows for a total of 14 months parental leave after the birth of a new child. Either spouse can take leave from the total 14 months, and they will receive 67% of their pay during time missed from work. It is hoped that these incentives may encourage the start or expansion of new families.

Integration

Due to demographic and labor challenges, Germany has actively encouraged immigration to fill the labor void over the last 50 years. Many have traveled from their homes in Turkey, Italy, Poland, Spain, etc. to work in Germany. While some, particularly other Europeans, returned home eventually, many have remained in Germany. Despite providing valuable labor, the successful integration of these immigrants has not always been so smooth. In the last 10 years, more inclusive citizenship laws have sought to address this issue, but there still is much work to be done. However, the 2006 World Cup and this year's 2010 World Cup seem to have been great moments of unification, as all Germans, regardless of background, have truly rallied around their team.

Modern Education System

Germany has a strong education system, but they suffered a crisis of confidence a few years ago when the international PISA results came out, and Germany finished lower than expected. This forced them to rethink the current structure of their system, which tends to determine educational tracks for college preparation, technical skills, and basic education as early as late elementary/early middle school. There is fluidity in the system and students can change tracks, but it is typically far easier to transition from college preparation to the other tracks than it is to transition the other way. Immigration issues also surface within education discussions as students with immigrant background have far lower completion rates and are far less likely to progress into and through the most rigorous programs of study. Germany is currently working on ways to merge the tracks, provide for flexibility within the system, and lift the performance of all student sub-populations.

Fair Distribution of Wealth

This is a challenge the world over, but Germany's unification and transition to a full market economy in the East has made this a more noticeable issue in Germany. Many former East Germans remember an era in which most people had similar basic levels of wealth. Today, the gap has widened and there is deep soul searching to determine the implications of this divide.

Germany's Standing in the World

Germany's past very much shapes the psyche of modern Germans. With the exception of cheering on their World Cup team and waving flags, Germans typically avoid any overt actions of patriotism or nationalism. There is tremendous awareness that nationalism gone awry helped to fuel Germany's most destructive era, and most Germans guard against this in any way possible.

In addition to the reluctance in displaying nationalism, they also feel considerable pressure to perform on a global level. Until very recently when China overtook them, Germany was the world's largest exporter. Germany is known as a leader in alternative energy and green initiatives. German products are known for craftsmanship, dependability, and engineering. Performance at a very high level is the rule, not just an expectation. Maintaining this level of success and execution can be a source of stress for the national consciousness.

Conclusion Regarding Major Issues

As I mentioned in my first posting (in entry submitted July 6, 2010) regarding these issues, they were explained in one of our meeting sessions in order to create some topics to consider as we traveled through Germany. They are generalizations. They do not in any way reflect the total complexity of this dynamic country, but they do hopefully provide some interesting possibilities for contemplation regarding Germany's path through the 21st Century.

Other Handouts/Resources Needed: Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet (starting on page 5 of this document), Issues of Modern Germany PowerPoint (see accompanying file) and research materials for investigating these issues or internet access in order to locate such resources.

Lesson Procedure

Introduction/Anticipatory Set: Students will view a series of six slides featuring images that could potentially reflect the six issues shaping Germany. After viewing each slide, they will attempt to identify each of the six major issues. Once they have made their predictions, the actual issues will be revealed to them along with some basic background on each issue (see **Steps of the Lesson**, below). *Note: Some of the issues might lend themselves more effectively to the suggested student tasks than others. If you feel that some of them do not work as well, feel free to present them, but restrict the students from choosing them to complete their exercises.*

Steps of the Lesson

1. Reveal each of the six issues by showing the slides of images again. Each image slide will be followed with a slide(s) that provides brief detail on how that issue shapes Germany today. This discussion should provide the students with an idea of what these major issues are and how they impact Germany. Hand out the **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet** as the students can use "**Activity 1**" to record any notes regarding each of the issues.
2. After the discussion, divide the students up into small groups in whatever way is most appropriate for the specific classroom setting. Have the students predict within their small groups the future impact of each of these major issues should they not be addressed in any way. They should record these predictions in the "**Activity 2**" section of their **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet**.
3. Next, each group should be assigned one of the issues or you may have them select their own. With this issue, they need to think about how their issue could be addressed by government policy, private groups, or even grass-roots action in order to capitalize on Germany's strengths, improve productivity, or promote harmony

and prosperity. They should outline their plan in the “**Activity 3**” section of the **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet**.

4. Next, students should go back to their own desks and look at the “**Activity 4**” section of the **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet**. It asks them to select an issue and decide if they want to check for the issue’s relevance/importance in another European country or the United States. (Teacher may want to have students report the issue they are choosing and country they will be comparing Germany to in order to ensure a diversity of choices.) After the country and issue are both selected, they need to devise a plan on how they will draw those conclusions. Will they use statistics? Will they search for articles? How will they gather their evidence? *During this planning, it may be necessary to discuss with students where they might be able to locate suitable demographic statistics, find articles that deal with these issues, etc.*
5. After the plan has been constructed, research/investigation time needs to be provided. Set aside appropriate research time based on the skills/work habits of the class and the depth of the inquiry you wish to pursue. Notes and sources may be recorded in the “**Activity 5**” section or on the student’s own paper.
6. Finally, after the research has been concluded. Students need to draw conclusions and comparisons, as well as cite the resources they used to discover their findings. This “report” can follow the simple format provided in “**Activity 6**” of the **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet** or can be far more elaborate based on the emphasis you wish to place on this task.

Concluding Steps

These tasks may vary depending on the time you wish to dedicate to these tasks, but the students could do the following:

1. Give brief presentations of the comparisons they made between Germany and their chosen country regarding their chosen issue.
2. After the presentations conduct a large class discussion centered around the following questions:
 - What countries were impacted by some of the same issues Germany is facing? Why might they have this in common?
 - Were there any countries that seemed to be much less impacted by a chosen issue? What might account for this difference?
 - Do many of the developed countries of the world seem to be facing similar circumstances? Why?
 - Examine the differences in the ways that nations are trying to address these issues.Note: Remember there are countless other questions or directions this discussion could take, so feel free to use this step as a way to allow students to make connections, synthesize, and draw meaning from their own investigation and the work of others.
3. Finally, “**Activity 7**” of the **Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet** can be used as a place for a final student reflection after the discussion and then handed in as a way to assess the student’s work throughout the entire process.

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

This packet will help you to discover some of the major issues that are shaping Germany today. It will also help you to make connections between how these issues impact not only Germany, but also other developed countries around the world.

Activity 1: Understanding the Six Major Issues: *In this section, we will discuss these six issues. You may use the space provided to take notes that better explain each issue and how it impacts Germany.*

Note-Taking on Each Issue

1. Demographic shifts and an aging population

2. Modern family policy's efforts to address an aging population

3. Immigration and integration

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet
Activity 1 Continued

4. Educational reforms

5. Addressing changes in the distribution of wealth

6. Germany's self-image and standing in the world

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Group Members: _____

Activity 2: Predicting Future Impact: *For each of the listed issues brainstorm within your group the possible impacts and effects these issues may have on Germany. Assuming they continue to be important factors within the nation, how will these issues change Germany? Will there be positive developments as a result of these issues or will they be negative? Make some predictions regarding Germany 10, 20, or 50 years from now assuming these same issues remain and record your ideas in the space provided.*

- 1. Demographic shifts and an aging population**

- 2. Modern family policy's efforts to address an aging population**

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Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Activity 3: Plan to Address One of the Six Major Issues: *At this point you may be assigned a specific issue or may get to choose one. Write the issue you will be working on in the blank provided. Within your group, think about how this issue could be addressed by government policy, private groups, or even grass-roots action in order to capitalize on Germany's strengths, improve productivity, or promote harmony and prosperity. Outline your plan in the space provided below and explain the hoped for outcomes of these efforts.*

Issue to be addressed: _____

Plan to address this issue

Results or outcomes you hope to see based on this plan

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Activity 4: Comparing the Impact of an Issue Between Nations: *Next, we want to examine whether this issue is having the same impact in another European nation or the United States as it is having in Germany. On your own, select an issue to investigate and choose a country to compare with Germany. Record your choices in the blanks below. Then devise a plan to investigate the impact of this issue in both places. Will you use statistics? Will you search for articles? Where will you look? How will you gather your evidence? You will have time set aside for research, but you need a concrete plan of what you want to look at to help you draw your conclusions.*

Issue to be studied:_____

Country to be compared with Germany:_____

Plan to investigate how this issue is shaping both Germany and the chosen country

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Activity 5: Research the Impact of the Issue on Both Countries: *In the space provided, you may take notes from your research. This is simply “work space” for you to organize your thoughts. At the very bottom, keep a basic list of the resources you are using. Include titles, web addresses, authors, sources of statistics, etc.*

Research Notes

Sources

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Activity 6: Drawing Conclusions---Final Report: Now that you have gathered the data, it is time to report back on your findings. Write your report in the space provided and make sure to draw direct comparisons between Germany and your chosen country on the issue you studied. Explain why you think those differences or similarities may exist. Be sure to credit your sources with basic parenthetical citations so we know where the data came from.

Issue studied:_____

Country used for comparison:_____

Final Report

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet
Activity 6: Drawing Conclusions----Final Report Continued (if necessary)

Understanding Modern Germany Activity Packet

Activity 7: Final Conclusions Based on Presentations and Class Discussion: *After the presentations of each student's work; respond to the following questions based on what you have learned.*

- What countries were impacted by some of the same issues Germany is facing? Why might they have this in common?
- Were there any countries that seemed to be much less impacted by a chosen issue? What might account for these differences?
- Do many of the developed countries of the world seem to be facing similar circumstances? Why?
- Examine the differences in the ways that nations are trying to address these issues.