

Both Sides of the Issue

Digging Deeper on Tariffs

A Mini Teacher's Guide

stosselintheclassroom.org

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Objectives

Students will be able to:

- define a tariff as presented in both videos.
- summarize the competing arguments that Oren Cass and the featured voices in the Stossel video make about tariffs.
- contrast the stated goals of the Trump tariffs with the economic effects documented in the Stossel video.
- justify which position is better supported by the evidence presented in the two videos.

Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

Emergency powers: legal authorities granted to the president to act quickly in response to a declared national crisis.

Free trade: the exchange of goods and services across borders with minimal tariffs, quotas, or other restrictions.

Liberation Day: President Trump's April 2025 announcement of a sweeping new tariff schedule.

Manufacturing: the production of goods, especially in factories.

Market volatility: rapid and unpredictable swings in the prices of stocks, bonds, or other investments.

Retaliation: the practice of one country responding to another country's tariffs by imposing tariffs of its own.

Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act: a 1930 U.S. law that raised tariffs on thousands of imported goods.

Tariff: a tax that a government places on imported goods.

Trade deficit: a situation in which a country buys more goods from other countries than it sells to them.

Trading bloc: a group of countries that agree to trade with one another on special terms, often while limiting trade with outside nations.

Discussion Questions

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch on statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video. Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. What is a tariff?
3. In the MSNBC video, Oren Cass said "we do need, ultimately, to have high tariffs" on what country?
4. In the Stossel video, we saw a graph that showed that after Trump enacted tariffs on steel, the U.S. gained 1,000 jobs, but lost 75,000 jobs. What can be learned from this?
5. In the MSNBC video, Katy Tur mentioned some of the goals the Trump administration has given for the tariffs. What were some of those goals?
6. In the Stossel video, Scott Lincicome said: "Just simply mandating that stuff be made in America sounds great, but it's going to cost us a lot more." Why is that?
7. Oren Cass mentioned that one of the motivations behind the tariffs is to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States. Is this a good motive? Why/Why not? Is it achievable? Why/Why not?
8. In the Stossel video, John Stossel said that Victor Schwartz "scoffs at Trump's claim that other countries pay the tariffs." Who did Schwartz say pays them?
9. Oren Cass said: "[W]e have been taken advantage of in our trading relationships for a very long time." What did he mean by this?
10. Victor Schwartz said: "You might be able to move a semiconductor plant to Michigan, but you can't make champagne in Oregon." What did he mean by this?
11. Oren Cass said the Trump administration wants "an alliance of countries that all agree 'we aren't really going to be trading a lot with China and doing a lot of investment with China.'" Why does the Trump administration want this? What would be the benefits? What would be the costs?
12. Victor Schwartz said: "Free trade is really a beautiful thing." Do you agree? Why/Why not?

13. Even if tariffs raise prices, is that worth it if they can be used as negotiating tools against other countries? Why/Why not?
14. Even if tariffs raise prices, is that worth it if they can be used to limit China's power? Why/Why not?
15. Should more products be manufactured in the United States? Why/Why not?
16. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
17. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
18. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
19. What else would you like to learn about this topic?

For more on this topic, see these previous editions of *Both Sides of the Issue*:
Both Sides: "[The Impact of Tariffs](#)," and *Both Sides*: "[Tariffs Revisited](#)."

Activities

Activity 1: Timeline of the Debate

Teacher: Tariff disputes are not new. This activity asks students to place events and arguments from BOTH videos on a shared timeline so they can see how today's debate echoes decades of history. Students work in pairs or small groups to build the timeline, then present one entry to the class.

Student directions:

1. Create a horizontal timeline on chart paper with the dates 1930, 2018, 2024, April 2025, and May 2025 (the month after Liberation Day).
2. Place at least one event or quotation from the Stossel video and one from the MSNBC video next to each date. For the early dates, include the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930) and the Trump steel tariffs (2018) referenced in the Stossel video.
3. Next to each entry, write a one-sentence label: did this event raise, lower, or keep tariffs the same? What did supporters say it would achieve? What did critics say went wrong?
4. At the far right of the timeline, add a prediction: if tariffs continue on their current path, what will students expect to see one year from today? Ground the prediction in evidence from both videos.

Activity 2: Stakeholder Analysis

Teacher: Tariffs move money among very different groups. This activity forces students to examine BOTH videos for evidence about who wins and who loses under the Trump tariff policy. The worksheet on the next page organizes their findings.

Student directions:

1. Using the worksheet on the following page, list each stakeholder group named or implied in the two videos: U.S. steel workers, U.S. companies that use steel, small business owners such as Emily Lay and Victor Schwartz, American farmers, Chinese exporters, European allies, and American consumers.
2. For each group, record one specific benefit the Cass video suggests tariffs could bring, and one specific cost the Stossel video suggests tariffs impose. Use direct quotations or paraphrases when possible.
3. Rank the stakeholders from most helped to most hurt, based only on the evidence in the two videos.
4. Be ready to defend your ranking in class discussion and to name a stakeholder the videos did not cover that you believe deserves attention.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Stakeholder Analysis: Digging Deeper on Tariffs

For each stakeholder, write one benefit suggested by the MSNBC (Cass) video and one cost suggested by the Stossel video. Then rank the groups from 1 (most helped) to 7 (most hurt).

U.S. steel workers

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

U.S. companies that use steel

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

Small business owners (e.g., Emily Lay, Victor Schwartz)

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

American farmers

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

Chinese exporters

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

European and other allied trading partners

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

American consumers

Benefit (Cass): _____

Cost (Stossel): _____

Rank (1-7): _____

Activity 3: Strongest Argument Challenge

Teacher: This activity requires students to treat both sides seriously by identifying the single strongest claim each video makes and then defending that choice in writing. Plan 20–25 minutes of class time or assign as homework.

Student directions:

1. From the MSNBC interview with Oren Cass, select the single strongest argument in favor of keeping, or strategically deploying, tariffs. Write the argument in one sentence and quote the exact evidence Cass offers to support it.
2. From the Stossel video, select the single strongest argument against the current tariff approach. Write the argument in one sentence and quote the exact evidence Stossel, Lincicome, Lay, or Schwartz offers to support it.
3. In one paragraph, explain why you chose the argument from Cass over his other points. Name at least two weaker points you rejected and explain what made them weaker.
4. In one paragraph, explain why you chose the argument from the Stossel video over its other points. Name at least two weaker points you rejected and explain what made them weaker.
5. End with a one-sentence verdict: if you had to publicly defend ONE of the two strongest arguments you identified, which would you defend, and why?

Activity 4: Socratic Seminar Preparation

Teacher: Good Socratic seminars depend on good questions. This activity asks students to generate questions that probe weaknesses in BOTH videos, then use those questions as the seeding material for a class seminar. Use the prepared question bank below as a starting point and require students to add at least two original questions per side.

Student directions:

1. Study the sample questions below, then write three additional questions of your own that challenge Oren Cass's reasoning. Your questions should target his evidence, his assumptions, or his predictions — not his motives.
2. Write three additional questions of your own that challenge the position taken in the Stossel video. Target the evidence, assumptions, or predictions offered by Stossel, Lincicome, or Schwartz.

3. In a circle, take turns posing questions and responding. A student who poses a question may not answer it; the responders must use specific language from the videos, not general opinion.
4. Close the seminar with a two-minute reflective write: which question most changed, or sharpened, your thinking about tariffs? Why?

Sample questions to challenge the Cass video:

- Cass argues the markets show investors believe “there’s a way to do this” because stocks are only down about 4 percent. Is a 4 percent decline truly a small signal, or could it mask larger damage that has not yet appeared?
- Cass supports “high tariffs on China” phased in more slowly. What evidence does he offer that a slower phase-in actually reduces costs, and what evidence would be needed to confirm that claim?
- Cass describes the administration’s end goal as a U.S.-centered trading bloc that excludes China. Which allies would have to agree, and what incentives would the United States need to offer them?

Sample questions to challenge the Stossel video:

- The Stossel video cites 1,000 steel jobs gained versus 75,000 lost in steel-using industries. What time period do those numbers cover, and what else happened in the economy during that period that could have contributed to the job losses?
- Victor Schwartz says “free trade is really a beautiful thing,” yet the video also acknowledges that countries such as Canada and India impose high tariffs on American goods. If our trading partners do not practice free trade, is unilateral free trade still the best policy? Explain your reasoning.
- The video connects today’s tariffs to the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930. What is different today about the structure of the U.S. economy, and do those differences weaken or strengthen the Smoot-Hawley comparison?

Activity 5: Policy Proposal

Teacher: After students have heard both sides, this activity asks them to draft their own tariff policy that borrows from BOTH videos. The goal is not to split the difference; the goal is to build a defensible proposal grounded in evidence from each source.

Student directions:

1. Write a one-page tariff policy proposal titled, “My U.S. Tariff Plan.” Your proposal must answer four questions: which countries, if any, should face tariffs; at what rates; for which product categories; and for how long.

2. Your proposal must borrow at least one element from the MSNBC interview with Oren Cass (for example, a phased-in approach, a narrower focus on China, or the idea of a trading bloc).
3. Your proposal must borrow at least one element from the Stossel video (for example, exemptions for goods that cannot be reasonably produced domestically, or a sunset clause to avoid a Smoot-Hawley-style escalation).
4. Close with a short "Trade-Offs" paragraph in which you name the specific costs your proposal imposes and the stakeholders, such as consumers, farmers, manufacturers, or foreign allies, who will bear them.
5. Be ready to present your proposal to the class and to answer questions from classmates who favored either side of the debate.