

Both Sides of the Issue

Foreign Aid

A MiniGuide

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About This Pairing

This installment of ***Both Sides of the Issue*** pairs two short videos that take different positions on whether U.S. foreign aid is the best way to help people in other countries. On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order pausing U.S. foreign assistance for a 90-day review. The review led to the cancellation of most programs, and by July 2025 the U.S. Agency for International Development had stopped administering foreign aid, with its remaining work moved to the State Department. The change sparked an ongoing debate about the true value of foreign aid. Should the United States be funding development in other countries? Has USAID been effective in achieving its goals? Are private charities more effective? We hear arguments from Bill Gates and Matt Zwolinski.

Videos in this pairing:

Video 1: *Bill Gates Explains How People Misunderstand U.S. Foreign Aid* (3:04).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbFBqLzCLXw>

Video 2: *World Poverty: Foreign Aid vs. Charity That Actually Works* (3:40).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIrEbiUIVQQ>

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- define foreign aid, the top-down model, and the bottom-up model as presented in the two videos.
- summarize the central arguments Bill Gates and Matt Zwolinski make about how the United States should help people living in poverty.
- contrast the assumptions each speaker holds about who is best positioned to decide how aid money is spent.
- appraise which approach to fighting global poverty has the strongest supporting evidence, and defend that judgment with specifics from both 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.

Bottom-Up model: an approach to fighting poverty that lets the poor decide how to spend resources rather than having outside experts plan for them.

Bureaucratic inefficiency: the waste, delay, or added cost that can result when programs require many layers of administration before help reaches the people it is meant for.

Corruption: the misuse of public power or funds for private gain, often through bribery, embezzlement, or favoritism by government officials.

Foreign Aid: money, goods, or services that one country gives or lends to another country, usually to support development, humanitarian relief, or political objectives.

GiveDirectly: a charity that transfers cash directly to people in extreme poverty so recipients, rather than outside experts, decide how the money is spent.

Green Revolution: the mid-twentieth-century transformation of agriculture in Asia and Latin America that introduced higher-yield seeds and modern farming techniques and is widely credited with helping avoid mass famine.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): the total monetary value of all goods and services produced within a country during a given period; one common measure of a country's overall economic activity.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO): a non-profit group that operates independently of any government and often works on humanitarian, development, or advocacy projects.

Self-Sufficiency: the condition of a country, community, or person being able to meet its own needs without relying on outside support.

Top-Down model: an approach to fighting poverty in which governments, international agencies, or outside experts decide what poor communities need and design programs for them.

Unintended Consequences: outcomes of a policy or program that were not planned or expected, sometimes the opposite of what was intended.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID): the federal agency that administered U.S. civilian foreign aid and development assistance until 2025, when its functions were transferred to the State Department.

Voluntary charity: giving that is freely chosen by donors rather than collected through taxation, leaving givers free to decide whether, how much, and to whom they contribute.

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 upon 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 foreign aid?
3. How much money do you think the U.S. spends annually on foreign aid? Look up the actual number. Was it higher or lower than you expected?
4. "Most foreign aid programs are based on a top-down model," Matt Zwolinski says. What is a top-down model?
5. How should the success of an aid program be measured? Bill Gates puts it this way: "If your goal is famine relief, then you should measure the grant by whether people didn't starve to death. You shouldn't go in and say, 'Okay, did the GDP go up?'" What did he mean by this?
6. One program described in Zwolinski's video successfully helped Ugandan farmers grow more maize. What unintended consequences followed?
7. In the past, according to Gates, programs were more often labeled "foreign aid" even when they were purely politically motivated — and he argues this damaged the reputation of foreign aid generally. Do you think foreign aid has a bad reputation today? Why or why not?
8. What does Zwolinski mean when he says that top-down systems often come with "bureaucratic inefficiency"?
9. Much foreign aid, in Gates's view, is genuinely aimed at moving poorer countries toward self-sufficiency. Should the U.S. government spend money to help other countries reach self-sufficiency? Why or why not?
10. In top-down systems, money for the poor is often channeled through their own governments — a pattern Zwolinski highlights. Is that a problem? Why or why not?
11. Once a "huge recipient" of foreign aid, Korea is now "a very significant donor." What conclusions can be drawn from that shift, and why does Gates raise it?
12. How does the bottom-up charity featured in Zwolinski's video differ from top-down foreign aid programs? Is one approach better than the other? Why or why not?
13. "When you label it 'aid,' it seems mysterious" — but examine the specific successes, Gates argues, and the value becomes clear. Do you agree? Why or why not?
14. Matt Zwolinski said private charities have strong incentives to keep their costs low, their impacts high, and to learn from their mistakes. Why is that? Why don't government programs have the same incentives?

15. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
16. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
17. 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?
18. What else would you like to learn about this topic?

Activities

Activity 1: Evidence Mapping

Teacher notes: This activity asks students to chart the specific claims each speaker makes and the evidence offered to support those claims. The goal is to move students past general impressions ("Gates was for it, Zwolinski was against it") and toward a precise comparison of how each speaker builds his case. Distribute the worksheet on the next page and give students access to both video transcripts or replay the videos as needed.

Student directions: Working alone or with a partner, complete the Evidence Mapping worksheet on the following page. For each speaker, list at least three specific claims, the evidence offered for each claim, and a brief note about whether you find the evidence convincing. Be ready to share your strongest example with the class.

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Evidence Mapping: Foreign Aid

For each speaker, list three specific claims he makes about foreign aid. Then identify the evidence he provides and rate how convincing you find that evidence.

BILL GATES — "Foreign Aid Has Real Successes"

Claim 1:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

Claim 2:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

Claim 3:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

MATT ZWOLINSKI — "Top-Down Aid Often Fails"

Claim 1:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

Claim 2:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

Claim 3:

Evidence:

Convincing? (1–5): _____ Why? _____

Activity 2: Perspective Swap Debate

Teacher notes: Divide the class into two teams. Assign each team the position OPPOSITE the one its members initially favored on a quick pre-survey ("Should the U.S. continue funding foreign aid programs?"). Give teams fifteen minutes to prepare their strongest case using specific points from the videos, then run a structured ten-minute debate. The point is not to win — it is to argue a position well, even one students did not start out holding.

Student directions: You will be arguing the position you said you DISAGREE with. Your team must build the strongest possible case using arguments from the video that supports your assigned side. In your prep time:

1. List the three strongest points from your assigned speaker's video.
2. Anticipate two counterarguments the other side will likely raise, and prepare responses.
3. Choose one team member to deliver the opening (two minutes), one for cross-examination (three minutes), and one for closing (two minutes).

After the debate, write a short reflection: did arguing for the opposite side change anything about how you see the issue? What was hardest to argue?

Activity 3: Common Ground Finder

Teacher notes: Students often assume the two speakers in a *Both Sides* pairing disagree about everything. In reality, Gates and Zwolinski likely share several premises — they both want poverty reduced, they both believe results should be measured, and they both think some programs work better than others. This activity asks students to identify the genuine common ground and then locate where the two sides actually diverge.

Student directions: On a sheet of paper, draw three columns labeled "Gates Only," "Both Agree," and "Zwolinski Only." Working with a partner, list at least:

- three points only Gates would make,
- three points only Zwolinski would make, and
- three points both speakers would likely accept.

When you finish, compare the "Both Agree" column with the "Only" columns. Write one paragraph answering this question: if both speakers actually agree on the goal, what exactly are they disagreeing about?

Activity 4: Letter to a Legislator

Teacher notes: Foreign aid policy is set in Washington. After viewing both videos, students should be ready to take an informed position and communicate it to a real audience. This activity produces a letter that draws on specific evidence from both videos rather than a general opinion essay. Letters can be addressed to

any current member of Congress; teachers may choose to mail or email the strongest letters as a separate extension.

Student directions: Write a one-page letter to a U.S. senator or representative recommending what the federal government should do about foreign aid. Your letter must:

1. Open with a clear statement of your recommendation.
2. Reference at least one specific point from the Bill Gates video AND at least one specific point from the Matt Zwolinski video.
3. Address the strongest objection to your position and explain why you still hold it.
4. End with a specific request — for example, support for a particular reform, a vote on a bill, or a hearing on the issue.

Use a respectful, professional tone. Your goal is to be taken seriously by a busy legislator's staff.

Activity 5: Exit Ticket Reflection

Teacher notes: Use this short writing prompt at the end of class to capture what students took away from the pairing. Collect responses; they can serve as a quick formative assessment showing whether students engaged with both perspectives or defaulted to the one they already preferred.

Student directions: On an index card or half sheet of paper, answer all three questions in complete sentences. Use specific examples from the videos.

1. What is the single strongest point Bill Gates makes?
2. What is the single strongest point Matt Zwolinski makes?
3. After watching both videos, has your thinking on foreign aid shifted? If yes, describe the shift in one sentence. If no, explain in one sentence what kept you anchored to your original view.