

South America

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

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CATEGORY: ARGENTINA: NOW

CONCEPTS: GOVERNMENT, economy, geography, race/ethnicity, colonialism, human rights

ACTIVITY: A DEBATE: ARGENTINE AND BRITISH CLAIMS TO THE FALKLAND/MALVINA ISLANDS. Until the Argentine-British confrontation over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in 1982 most people in the U.S. were unaware of the existence of the Islands and the centuries-old dispute over their ownership. This dispute represents only one of many territorial disputes in Latin America which might again produce armed conflict. By investigating and presenting both sides of the 1982 crisis, students will become aware of some of the major human, political, economic and geographical issues involved in the Falkland/Malvinas question and other possibly explosive situations.

OBJECTIVES: Students will learn the background of a recent international incident and will be able to explain some of the major issues involved in a territorial dispute.

MATERIALS: A map showing location of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. Copies of the British and Argentine "position papers"

PROCEDURE: Divide the class in half or choose two smaller groups of students to represent Argentine and British interests. Supply each side with copies of the corresponding position papers. Allow the students to study and discuss their own position with their groups. They will also have to choose one or two people to present their views. When the students are ready, hold a debate consisting of a timed statement by each team and questions or challenges by students from the other team or the class in general.

HELPFUL HINTS: Before the debate everyone should be given a brief background into the Falklands/Malvinas situation. England and Argentina have been disputing ownership of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands for over a century. The Islands themselves are rather bleak and have only been used for seal and walrus hunting and later for sheep ranches. There have never been more than 2000 people living on the Islands. Have the students locate the Islands on a map. Strategically they have been important because they are relatively near the Southern tip of Latin America and if the Panama Canal were closed for any reason this would be a major sea route. No oil or mineral deposits have been found, but some people believe there may be off-shore petroleum. The position of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands may also play an important role in the distribution and exploitation of the resources of the Antarctic since those nations which own territory adjacent to the region will share proportionately in the jurisdiction over the Antarctic.

Up to the present the dispute has been a highly emotional issue. Argentine school children learn that "the Malvinas are Argentine" and that England stole them in an act of piracy. It is considered a patriotic duty to fight for their return. The English also feel that keeping them is patriotic and that they can't be bullied by the emotional Argentines who have no legal rights. In both cases national pride is at the heart of the dispute.

In the exercise we have used two separate names for the Islands. Argentines insist they are the Malvinas Islands while Britain calls them the Falklands.

On April 2, 1982, Argentina invaded the Islands. The British Royal Marines stationed there were forced to surrender. The United Nations passed a resolution calling for Argentine withdrawal and President Reagan backed Britain. England sent battleships and aircraft. On May 2, the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano was sunk by a British submarine with a loss of 301 crew members. Britain continued to battle and make advances and finally Argentina was forced to withdraw. The crisis ended and the two nations had to return to the negotiating table.

As a postscript, following the debate, students should be told that Argentina's military government fell shortly after the invasion. Once it became clear to the people of Argentina that the military had led Argentine troops to battle without proper clothing, food and arms they felt that the military had shown its incompetency. An embarrassed armed forces was forced to call for general elections, ending the dictatorship and returning Argentina to civilian rule. Some of the military figures involved in the invasion are now being prosecuted by the elected Argentine government.

VOCABULARY: territorial dispute, jurisdiction, principle of self-determination

RELATED ACTIVITIES: There are a series of other disputes which have played and continue to play a role in Latin America. Locate the areas of these disputes on a map of South America:

1. The Beagle Canal: Chile vs. Argentina
2. Bolivia desires access to the sea: Bolivia, Chile, Peru
3. Guatemalan-Belize border
4. The Panama Canal: U.S. vs. Panama
5. Colombian-Venezuelan border
6. Guyana-Surinam border

RESOURCES: Most of the sources for the Argentine side of the dispute are in Spanish and not readily available in the United States. For the British viewpoint see Christopher Dobson, John Miller and Ronald Payne. The Falklands Conflict, London: Coronet Books, 1982.

POSITION PAPER - ARGENTINA

Historical Claims: Spain was the only nation to achieve effective control and colonization of the Malvinas Islands prior to the 1800's. With Argentine Independence from Spain, Argentina should retain possession of the Malvinas as part of the legal continuity of the new Republic of Argentina over the rights and obligations inherited from Spain.

Nobody is certain who first sighted the Malvinas Islands. Prior to European discovery of the Americas, the Islands were uninhabited. Old maps indicate that Spanish explorers were probably the first to see them, but the first claim was made by France in 1764. In 1765, the French established the first colony which they called Port Louis after King Louis XV. Shortly afterwards the British established a colony called Port Egmont and claimed the Malvinas Islands for Britain. France and Britain were the first to dispute the Islands. Spain also entered the dispute and sought possession through legal and diplomatic channels. France recognized Spain's claim and abandoned Port Louis after receiving 618,108 pounds from Spain. On October 4th, 1766, Spain named Felipe Rufz Puente first governor of the Malvinas, and placed the Islands under the jurisdiction of the viceroyalty of the River Plate (Buenos Aires).

Soon Britain abandoned its base at Port Egmont and Spain became the only real colonizer of the Malvinas Islands. Spain maintained small colonies and agricultural settlements, while other nations' whaling and seal hunting ships landed occasionally for supplies and fresh water. British vessels frequently landed but usually in secret, since Britain did not dispute Spanish claims but wanted to use the Islands to hunt and resupply without any control.

During Argentina's war for independence in the early 1800's, neither Spain nor Argentina could maintain much control over the Malvinas Islands. There was no clear authority there and soon British and North American crews, acting like pirates, took over the Islands, hunting and killing thousands of seals and sea lions for their fur and oils. After Argentina's liberation from Spain, Buenos Aires sent a ship to take control again and put an end to the chaos. There were difficulties in re-establishing colonies because Argentina itself was going through civil wars and because British and North American crews fought to keep exploiting the Islands. Argentina did establish a colony called Port Soledad and in December of 1831 a North American warship landed there, destroyed the Argentine arms cache, took Argentinian prisoners and raided and sacked the colonists' homes. Still, Argentina tried to maintain its colonies on the Malvinas and put an end to the chaos and piracy.

In 1833 a British warship landed at Port Soledad. Captain Onslow declared that he had come to make the Malvinas a British possession. He gave the Argentinians 24 hours to abandon the Islands. Since the people in Port Soledad had few arms and were by far outnumbered, they could not resist and

returned to Argentina. Because Argentina was a young nation plagued with civil wars and just trying to keep alive as a country, Britain was able to bully Argentina, which has never recovered the Malvinas Islands. Argentina has never recognized British rights to the Malvinas Islands and has tried by all diplomatic means to achieve their return.

International Law. Britain is defying a United Nations resolution by not returning the Malvinas Islands to Argentina.

In 1965 the General Assembly of the United Nations approved a resolution urging Britain and Argentina to finalize negotiations to peacefully end the Malvinas dispute. The 94 nations that voted in favor of the resolution (0 voted against, 14 abstained) in this way recognized Argentina's right to the Malvinas Islands. The resolution implies that the current situation is not acceptable. Even members of Britain's Labor Party have indicated a desire to turn over the Islands to Argentina. Britain's refusal to negotiate goes against international opinion and the desires of the United Nations.

Geography. The Malvinas Islands occupation by the British is an insulting colonial remnant in Latin America.

The Malvinas are many thousands of miles away from England. They are geographically part of Latin America. The fact that the Islands are still under Britain's control is a humiliating reminder to all Latin Americans of the past when Europe thought it could exploit Latin America and control it against the Latin Americans themselves. Geographically, England has no right to keep a part of Latin American territory which it took by an act of piracy in the first place.

Principle of Self-Determination. The argument of self-determination is not valid in the case of the Malvinas Islands.

The United Nations has established the principle of self-determination. This means that the people who live in an area should have a right to decide who should govern them. Argentina respects the right of self-determination for the world's people. However, Britain's refusal to turn over the Malvinas to Argentina because the British colonizers who now live there don't want to be Argentine is not a correct application of this idea.

The people who now live on the Malvinas are British people and not the original inhabitants of the Islands. They came to the Islands by an invasion and forced the Argentines to leave. If a foreign government invades your city and makes you leave, and then brings its own people to live in your houses, can it then say that the people now living there have a right to decide who rules the city? That would not be the principle of self-determination.

Economic Importance. The Malvinas will help decide who can use the resources of the Antarctic Region which should be open to the nations of the Southern Hemisphere.

At the end of this century the Antarctic will probably be divided among the nations which border it. If England keeps control of the Malvinas they will get a part of the Antarctic. That part should go to Argentina since the people of the Southern Hemisphere should be the ones who use the Antarctic's resources.

Position Paper - England

Historical Claims: British control of the Falklands is historically and legally correct.

In 1690 the British Captain Strong made the first officially recorded landing on the Falkland Islands. The first British settlement was established in 1766, but up to 1833 there was a period of some confusion, with France, Britain, Spain and then the Argentine government at various times establishing small, local settlements, none of which lasted more than a few years. Apart from having a small settlement and a prison colony for a short period on the Islands before 1833 (in 1831 the United States Navy ejected most of these people for piracy), Argentina's claim to the Islands is based mainly on her having been the successor to the Spanish Viceroyalty of the River Plate which also governed most of modern Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile.

In 1833 the British took control of the Islands, and from that date have been in open, continuous, effective and peaceful possession, occupation and administration. The people who came to live there thereafter became the first permanently established population in the Islands.

Principal of Self-Determination. Britain must defend the Falkland Islanders right to self-determination.

The inhabitants of a country are the best judges of their own interests. The United Nations has recognized that "all peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status." The Falkland Islanders have expressed over and over their desire to remain British. They are not, as Argentina claims, a temporary population: 75% were born on the Islands and most are from families established there for well over a century. The Falkland Islanders have no less right to be accepted internationally as a "people" with rights of self-determination than the population of Argentina. England has a duty to protect their rights.

The Situation in Argentina: Argentina has been authoritarian, repressive, antidemocratic and its standard of living is much lower than on the Falklands. To turn the Islands over to Argentina would be an act of cruel colonialism.

At the time of the Argentine invasion in 1982, Argentina lived under a military dictatorship. In fact, Argentina has a long history of such undemocratic governments. Under this dictatorship at least 9,000 people have been killed because they disagreed with the government.

Much of Argentina is poor. Slums fill the large cities; there is high unemployment. People in the Falklands are relatively well-off; there are no slums. There is no repression and killing of people who do not agree. Taking this into account it would have been inhuman to turn the Falklands over to the Argentine dictatorship.

The only reason Argentina's military decided to invade the Falkland Islands in 1982 was to make a show of their "patriotism" and make people forget the problems inside the country.

International Law: The invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentina was an act of unprovoked military aggression and a clear violation of international law.

Britain has always been willing to negotiate diplomatically with Argentina over the Falklands Islands. While it would be immoral to negotiate the right of self-determination for the Falkland Islanders, we have met with Argentina many times and given many concessions, including, in recent years, the right of Argentine citizens to travel to the Falklands without a passport. The invasion itself took place while a series of negotiations were in progress in New York. Argentina's attack was unprovoked, and a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of settlement of dispute by peaceful means and of self-determination of peoples, both of which are enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Economic Importance: Economically the Falkland Islands are important only for the people who live there.

Generations of Falkland Islanders have made a good living raising sheep and exporting the wool. The most important consideration is to allow them to continue the way of life they have chosen. Turning the Islands over to Argentina would place the Islanders in a much weaker economy and their way of life would probably be destroyed.

(Much of this position paper has been adapted from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's publication The Falkland Islands: The Facts, London, 1982.)