

People's Pie

a game guide for teachers

People's Pie is an interactive online video game designed to teach your students about the federal budget. The game is a balancing act: Students must fund important programs without setting tax rates too high or borrowing too much money. To succeed, they must keep their citizens happy and avoid a burdensome national debt. Can your students master the *People's Pie*? (approx. 15 mins)



Learning Objectives

- Analyze how federal tax and spending policies affect the national budget and the national debt
- Explain how federal, state, and local taxes support the economy as a function of the government
- Describe various types of projects and services provided through local, state, national taxes

Prerequisites

Nothing! *People's Pie* is designed for students to learn how the federal budget works. Although the game involves complex concepts, it provides simple, student-friendly descriptions for the basic concepts required to succeed in the game.

HOW TO START THE GAME

You must first decide how to structure taxes and entitlements:

1. Set the tax levels

Set the level for Corporate, Payroll, and Income taxes at None, Low, Medium, or High.

2. Set the age for entitlements

Decide at what age citizens should start receiving Social Security and Medicare benefits. The higher the age, the less money is needed for Social Security & Medicare. Be careful though: A high retirement age makes citizens very unhappy!

3. Accept your policy

The "Policy Summary" on the bottom right of the screen shows how much money you will raise through taxes as well as the current amount of national debt.

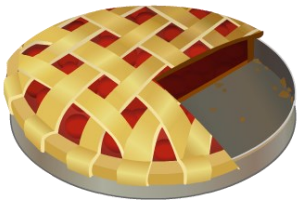
WHOLE CLASS PLAY

If you can't access individual computers, project *People's Pie* in your classroom and use it as a teaching tool. Guide your class through the game, making collective decisions and experimenting to see the effect of various choices.

TIP: The higher the taxes, the more money will be available for programs...but the less satisfaction for citizens! Make sure to keep track of "Citizen Satisfaction" at the bottom left of the screen.

HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR PIE

In the second stage of the game, you will decide whether to fund specific programs in ten different government agencies.



1 Lined up in the top left corner, as well as across the main part of the screen, are representatives of government agencies and programs. Click on one to view programs that you can choose to fund or cut.



2 This bar shows the citizens' happiness. Watch it carefully: You'll lose the game if it runs out during the year!

3 This section shows the budget you started with, what you've borrowed and spent, and how much money you have left. You'll need your reserve amount to pay Social Security and Medicare, as well as any interest on money you borrowed in past years.

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④ Clicking on an agency shows you a description and a financial breakdown of spending for that agency.

⑤ Each agency has a certain amount of required funding. The required funding is always included in your bill total below.

⑥ You'll also see a set of proposals. Click the proposal to see an explanation. You must decide whether to cut or fund each proposal.



TIP: Citizens will be unhappy when popular proposals are cut AND when silly or unneeded proposals are funded. So choose carefully!

⑦ The pie will shrink and grow according to the amount of budget you have remaining. Don't forget to monitor citizen satisfaction!

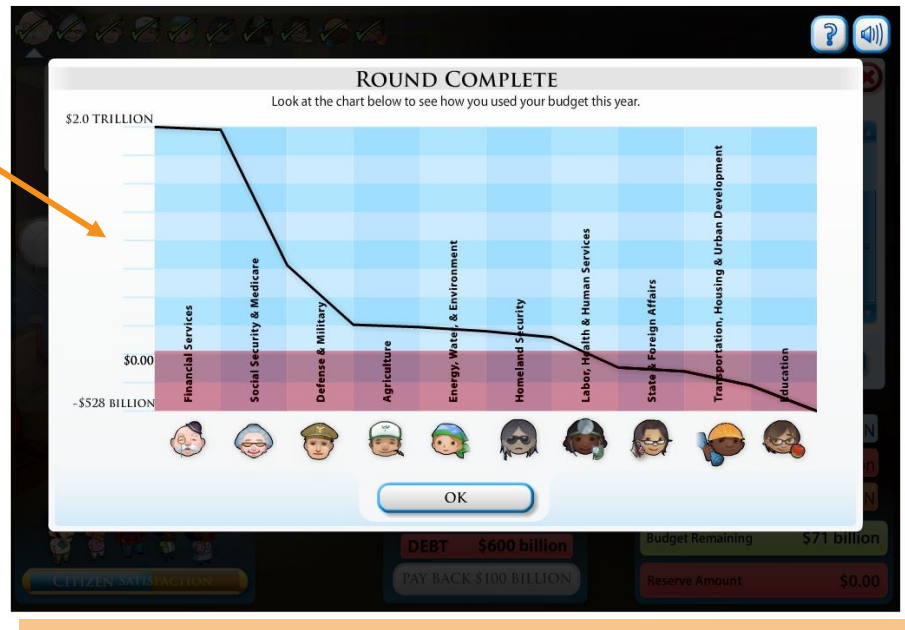
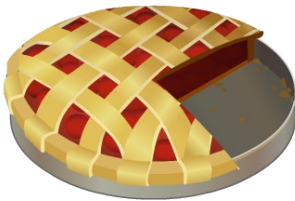
⑧ Here you can borrow money. Borrowing money will upset your citizens, but it can help you fund a bill you otherwise couldn't afford. Careful: Your interest rate rises fast when you borrow money. Borrowing too much will cost you a lot over time.

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The game will go through three "budget years." *People's Pie* will end early, however, if citizen satisfaction reaches a very low level. So be careful, and keep a balanced budget!

⑨ At the end of each budget year, you will see a "round complete" screen that shows you how you spend your money that year.



MAKING THE MOST OF THE GAME

Increase the learning value by setting criteria for students to follow. For example, assign them to...

- Play the game once with the Social Security age set at 63 and the next time at 70.
- Prioritize certain issues and deprioritize others during one game, then play again reversing those priorities.
- Play once being cautious about borrowing, then play again borrowing a lot.
- Set the taxes a certain way one time and a different way the next time.

Use the students' experiences from these assignments as a springboard for discussion.

TAXES

Corporate Tax None Low Medium High

Like individuals, all U.S. corporations must pay taxes on the money they earn each year.

Payroll Tax None Low Medium High

To fund programs like Social Security and Medicare, employers take this tax out of their employees' paychecks.

Income Tax None Low Medium High

This tax is a percentage of each person's earned income. The more you make, the higher percentage you pay!

ENTITLEMENTS

63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70

Raising the retirement age will reduce Social Security & Medicare costs, but the citizens won't be happy about it.

CLASSROOM CONVERSATION STARTERS

Pre-Game Questions

You can use these questions to lead into playing *People's Pie* in the classroom:

- What do you think it means to say we have a "national budget"?
- How does the government get money?
- What kinds of things does the government spend money on?



Post-Game Questions

Use these questions as a way to debrief the individual experiences of playing *People's Pie*:

- How did you feel when the citizens in the game did not like your budget decisions? If people did not like your budget decision, does that mean it was a bad choice?
- Why do you think people usually don't like taxes?
- Based on the programs you saw in the game, are there any programs you think are so important they're worth borrowing money for? Why or why not?
- What types of things should we use taxes to pay for? What shouldn't we use taxes to pay for?

Activity

Number the following categories of expenses in order of least important for government spending (Score = 1) to most important for government spending (Score = 10) based on your opinion. Then, compare your answers with a partner and answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security & Medicare | <input type="checkbox"/> State & Foreign Affairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Labor, Health, and Human Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defense & Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeland Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Energy, Water, and Environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture |

1. Did your partner number the categories in the same order? Why or why not?
2. What category do you think the government spends the most money on? Why?
3. What category should the government spend the most money on? Why?