

This activity is designed to illustrate to students how the sources provided in any given synthesis prompt may be perceived as “useful” from a variety of perspectives. Students take positions as members of society who must examine the information and weigh what they know and understand about that information, selecting what’s important and understanding why it is important, in order to enter the conversation with an informed and judicious opinion.

The scenario:

A community-based committee, composed of a variety of stakeholders, has been assembled to debate and forward recommendations with regard to the following question: Should our local government support and develop initiatives that promote the production, distribution, and consumption of “local food”?

Group students into 8 groups and provide each group with a folder containing only the sources from the 2011 “Locavore” synthesis prompt. Each folder also contains ONE of the following stakeholder profiles:

You are a worker in a food bank. You are largely responsible for soliciting and collecting donations from individuals, grocery stores, and restaurants, as well as from corporate donors, and making sure that those donations are inventoried, stored, and then distributed to those in need of the food bank’s services. Since food must be easy to store, it must be non-perishable, and the average food bank box often consists of mostly “filler” foods such as pastas and rice, although you make an effort to include equally inexpensive yet high-nutrition foods such as dried beans. Recently you have noticed that as food prices have risen, the number and volume of donations has decreased. At the same time, the number of people relying on food banks has increased.

You are the city councilor for Ward 17, which has a diverse population of largely middle- and lower-middle-class citizens. A relatively small number of residents are working-class or on social assistance, with and without families, living in some of the small apartment buildings dotting the ward. Many of the citizens are older “empty nesters” who are slowly selling their family homes and being replaced by young families. These new residents are relatively educated, involved in their community, and while perhaps not affluent, are willing to spend a bit more for goods and services they consider worthwhile. Recently, a Farmer’s Market has opened in the ward, and it has attracted a lot of attention and patronage from those living nearby. Approximately 30 different farmers and growers from the local area sell their produce, meat products, and other locally-produced goods once a week throughout the year, and the market is becoming a community hub. The neighbourhood around it also includes three upscale chain supermarkets, two discount chain supermarkets, one independent supermarket, and numerous small “mom-and-pop” grocery stores.

You are a thirty-something new parent who has just bought a house from a couple who had retired and, like many others in this neighbourhood, is now downsizing. You have a comfortable but modest combined household income; you work for a financial institution and your husband works for an insurance company.

AP English Language and Composition
“Locavore” Synthesis Role-Play Activity

During your maternity leave you became very involved in a local mothers’ circle, and many of the mothers enjoy sharing recipes and other parenting tips. Recently, one of the mothers brought in a cookbook that promoted making simple, healthy, seasonal meals from locally-sourced products, arguing that this was a healthier choice for both adults and children. Although you can easily buy organic food at the local supermarkets, you are intrigued by the concept of buying local, despite a few reservations about availability and cost.

You are a farmer cultivating a small, family-owned farm just north of the city. Recently you have begun a couple of new enterprises, encouraged by the increased interest in fresh, local, organic food. First, you have started selling at a couple of Farmer’s Markets in the city. Second, you have instituted a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, whereby clients pay a flat rate for a box of fresh seasonal produce to be delivered to them via the markets once a month throughout the year. Because of the quality of your produce and the popularity of your initiatives, you are currently running at capacity, with 200 CSA clients and an average of about \$500 in sales per Farmer’s Market (two markets a week). You’ve had requests from a couple of other markets to attend; this would mean hiring additional staff to take the produce to market and sell it. You also have a waiting list of about 50 potential clients for the CSA, but you just don’t have the produce to sell to them at this time, nor do you have the available land or manpower to expand production on the farm. However, you have a couple of friends who are also farmers on a similar scale, who are interested in joining your ventures.

You are the manager of a large chain grocery store in a well-trafficked area adjacent to both a very affluent neighbourhood and an up-and-coming neighbourhood that is enjoying an influx of new residents to both single-family homes and new condo buildings. As a very established brand, your store offers a wide variety of food products from around the world – you can get pretty much anything you’re looking for, at any time of year. Prices are fairly competitive, although many of your customers are willing to spend a little extra for organic or artisanal foods. You’re aware of some competition from other supermarkets in the area, including two major chain competitors and a couple of discount supermarkets, but your market share seems to be holding. You are also aware of a recently-opened Farmer’s Market, which seems to be drawing a lot of interest from the residents, and you have considered including more local offerings at your store in order to capitalize on what seems to be a growing desire for such things. Your supply contracts and corporate safety regulations, however, do not allow you to work with independent farmers; you would have to find large, corporately-owned local farms to bring in such goods. Strangely, though, produce from places like Florida and Mexico tends to be cheaper because of the scale of production and the cheap labour in those places.

You are a registered dietician working in a neighbourhood that ranges from middle- to upper-middle-class. Recently you have been fielding many questions from clients interested in the health benefits of organic foods, and now also increasing questions about whether foods sourced locally are healthier than those brought in from far away. You’ve read conflicting reports about the benefits and have decided you need to learn more. In the meantime, you conservatively counsel people to eat as wide a variety of foods as possible, including fresh foods when they’re available, but noting that frozen produce is just as beneficial, especially in the winter months when it’s difficult to come by truly fresh fruits and vegetables.

AP English Language and Composition
“Locavore” Synthesis Role-Play Activity

You are an environmental activist with a specific interest in local foods. In particular, you are very interested in a local initiative that promotes finding fruit-bearing trees in the city, organizing picking parties in which 1/3 of the fruit goes to the landowner whose property the trees are on, 1/3 goes to the volunteer pickers, and 1/3 goes to a local food bank. You have also recently become very involved in the planning and running of a couple of area Farmers’ Markets, getting in touch with local food producers and co-ordinating their participation, publicizing the markets, and helping to maintain quality control so that customers are satisfied with the market and the goods they buy there. You have been very pleased with the modest but tangible success of these enterprises; you foresee increased enthusiasm for similar and spin-off enterprises in the future, and hope that more people will see the economic, health, and environmental benefits of supporting local food production, eating seasonally, and avoiding waste and non-sustainable ecological footprints.

You are a former teacher in her 50s living alone. Several years ago you were in a bad car accident, and as a result suffered injuries that made it impossible for you to return to work. Although you do some tutoring and other occasional work, it is difficult for you to work enough hours to make the kind of money you used to, and you have had to sell your home and move into a small apartment. With all your support network in the area, you made an effort to stay in the same neighbourhood where you formerly lived. Fortunately, there is a mixture of moderately-priced stores in the area. Still, sometimes you find it difficult to make ends meet, and more often than not rely on the food bank when your social assistance runs out toward the end of the month. You maintain a small garden patch in the backyard of the house where your apartment is, but in the winter months you get far less in the way of fruits and vegetables than you would like.

Students work in their groups to read through their stakeholder profiles (they can add any details that are in line with those they are provided to further flesh out the interests of the stakeholders). They should have an initial discussion in which they determine the kinds of issues that will be important to their stakeholder.

They should then read through the sources, discussing the following:

- Which sources address the stakeholder’s key concerns? In role as your stakeholder, do you find this information important/useful to you or not? Why?
- Which points will you select from the sources to use to support your position?
- Knowing that others hold other positions, which points will you select to argue against, and how?
- Can you think of any specific examples in your own experience and knowledge (or outlined in the provided material) that illustrate the points you have made – both in favour of your own position and showing the problems with the other possible positions?

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“Locavore” Synthesis Role-Play Activity

Have the students select spokespersons for their groups and have each group prepare a two-minute presentation to be delivered by the spokesperson in role as the stakeholder.

Stage your “community meeting” in which each stakeholder presents to the committee, using the source material and making the reasons for their positions very clear, including how they believe the policy will affect their community.

Provide the students with the initial prompt page from the exam question, and debrief in a discussion about how to approach the question as an argument that must be developed using the sources, whether they support the position or provide opportunities for refutation.

(For more discussion on the levels of argument implied by the prompt, see my blog post about this question here: <http://blogs.bedfordstmartins.com/highschoolbits/uncategorized/synthesis-spot-the-stand/>)