Live Debate: The New Deal

Resolved: The New Deal helped end the Great Depression. A whole-class debate played like a football game.

Grades 9–12
U.S. History, APUSH, Government

Prep: 1–2 periods
Debate: 1–3 periods

APUSH Period 7
The Great Depression and the New Deal

Free
the whole class game

The plan

Two sides, Pro and Con. Every student takes a football position: the Captain (opening), the Quarterback, Running Back and Wide Receiver (three arguments), the Linebacker, Cornerback and Safety (three rebuttals), the Kicker (conclusion), Booth Reviewers (check the other side's sources) and Sideline Reporters (the Press). You run each step from your computer; students research live, send ideas to the speaker, and you make a call after every possession. The whole game, prep sheets and printables are free.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Make a clear, defensible claim about the New Deal and support it with specific, cited evidence.
- Rebut an opposing argument by finding a weakness in its logic, evidence or sources, and answer rebuttals of their own.
- Evaluate sources quickly: who made it, when, and whether it is primary or secondary (the Booth Reviewer's job).
- Explain how historians and economists reach different conclusions about the New Deal from the same evidence.

Standards

CA HSS 11.6.4	The New Deal economic policies promoted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt
CA HSS 11.6.5	The effects of the Great Depression and the New Deal on American workers and society
AP U.S. History Topic 7.10	The Great Depression and the New Deal: causes, programs and their effects
CA HSS Analysis HI 4	Recognize that interpretations of history are subject to change as new information is uncovered
CA HSS Analysis HR 4	Construct and test hypotheses; collect, evaluate and use evidence from multiple sources
C3 D2.His.16.9-12	Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past

C3 D4.1.9-12	Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims
CCSS SL.11-12.1	Participate in collaborative discussions; respond to diverse perspectives and resolve contradictions
CCSS SL.11-12.3	Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric
CCSS WHST.11-12.1	Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content

Summaries. Official text: California History–Social Science Content Standards; AP U.S. History; California History–Social Science Analysis Skills, grades 9–12; C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS); Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies.

Before the game (1–2 periods)

Day 1
Teams and research

- Open the class game and give each side its code (or one class code). Students join, take positions, and read the background.
- Each student fills in their prep sheet on their device (or on paper: the free prep sheet) and gathers research in their notebook. Prep is saved on the device as they type; **Save to my teacher** puts a copy on your computer.

Day 2
Huddle

- Each side meets: the Captain checks that the three arguments don't overlap and that each rebuttal speaker has studied the other side's likely argument. Teammates read each other's prep on the Team board.

The game (1–3 periods)

Pre-Game Show
10 min

- Open the projector in its own window. Each Captain gives the opening statement; their prepared text is on the big screen behind them.

Each quarter
about 25 min

- Kickoff → Argument (3 min) → Interview (the other side's Sideline Reporters ask clarifying questions, 3 min) → Commercial Break (research and coach, 5 min) → Rebuttal (2 min) → **your call** (2 min). Then the turnover and the same for the other side.
- At the call: tick claim, evidence and cited source; mark what the rebuttal knocked out; add flags. Share your notes on the projector and explain the call in a sentence or two.
- Absent speaker? The game subs in the most similar teammate with two extra minutes to prepare; the Captain (or you) can change the pick.

4th Quarter
10 min

- Each side's Kicker gives the conclusion. A conclusion that answers an earlier rebuttal is a two-point conversion.

After-Game Show 15 min	• The replay review: go back through every drive with your notes; reopen any call. A tie: choose a winner on the whole game, or play Overtime (each side nominates a player to answer one of your critiques after 5–10 minutes of coaching). • Students write the "game film" reflection and download their **Game Replay PDF** to attach to your Google Classroom assignment. You download the results file (every student's notes, chats and stats).

Multi-day: click **Save game** at the bell (your computer also keeps an automatic copy) and open it the next day. Students rejoin with the same code.

Scoring the game (your calls)

CALL	WHEN	POINTS
Touchdown	Clear claim + evidence + cited source, and the rebuttal knocks none of it out (80 yards)	6 (+1 extra point if the Interview was answered well)
Field goal	The drive reaches the opponent's 30 (50+ yards): most of the argument stands	3
Stopped	Less than 50 yards: the rebuttal held	0
Interception	The rebuttal proves the evidence false or made up	6 to the defense
Two-point conversion	A conclusion that answers an earlier rebuttal or sums up the case convincingly	2
Flags	Personal attack (15 yds) · fact with no source (10) · not ready (5)	yards

Practice on four real possessions first: the interactive scoring guide (scoring.html) walks you through them.

Grading (the Game Replay PDF)

	4	3	2	1
Prep	Every field of the prep sheet complete; three pieces of cited evidence	Most fields; some sources	Partly complete	Little or none
Speaking	Clear claim, evidence and reasoning; answers questions directly	Clear, some support	Reads without support	Did not speak
Team play	Useful research sent to teammates; assists; on-task chat	Some useful messages	Few contributions	None, or off-task
Notes and game film	Notes at every step; a specific, honest self-assessment	Most steps; general reflection	Some notes	Little

Debate etiquette (share with students)

- Be kind and respectful; never insult another debater. Comment on the argument, not the person.
- Stay on the question. Stick to the facts. Keep your tone civil.

- Good criticism: "I believe your argument is flawed because...", "The evidence appears to show something different...", "That would be true if it weren't for...", "While my opponent makes a good point, it is irrelevant to the question because..."

History to know (the basics)

By 1933 about a quarter of American workers had no job and thousands of banks had failed. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (1933–1938) brought relief and jobs programs, rules for banks and the stock market, price and wage codes, farm programs, Social Security and protections for unions. The economy grew from 1933 to 1937, fell into a sharp recession in 1937–38, and did not fully recover until the buildup for World War II. Historians and economists still disagree about how much the New Deal helped or hurt the recovery: students should not expect one right answer.

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