In December 2012, Adam Lanza shot his mother with her own gun, stole her other guns, and proceeded to Sandy Hook Elementary School. He shot through the locked doors with a semi-automatic rifle and subsequently fired 154 bullets in under five minutes, killing 26 people.

The guns Lanza’s mother owned were purchased legally. Some people believe we should have gun control laws in our country that make it harder to obtain certain kinds of guns. However, opponents of gun control note that the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens the right to “bear arms,” or carry weapons. They argue that the founding fathers wanted people to be able to use guns to defend themselves.

Those who favor gun control note that when the Second Amendment was passed, the typical gun was a revolver pistol (Figure A). It held six bullets. In comparison, Lanza’s gun, which looked like Figure B, could shoot dozens of bullets. Gun control supporters argue that if high-capacity guns were illegal, schemes like Lanza’s would have resulted in many fewer deaths. The dominant reasons people give for owning guns are personal safety, hunting, and sports activities. Semi-automatic guns are not meant for hunting or simple self-defense.

Most developed countries have stricter gun control laws than the U.S. They require safety courses, universal background checks, gun registrations, and waiting periods to buy a gun after requesting one. In contrast, these regulations are not in place in many U.S. states. The rate of gun-related deaths in the U.S. is about 5 times higher than in Canada, 12 times higher than in Australia, 41 times higher than in the United Kingdom, and 177 times higher than in Japan. According to a report commissioned by the FBI, 67.8% of U.S. homicides involved guns.

Questions for Classroom Discussion:
- Why do some people say the U.S. should have stricter gun regulations?
- What are some gun control laws that other countries have in place? Why do you think some U.S. states have similar laws and others don’t?
- Why do some people believe that taking guns away from Americans will put them in danger?
- Do you think stricter gun control would have prevented Adam Lanza’s attack on Sandy Hook Elementary School? Why or why not?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

**scheme** (noun) a plan, especially a sly or dishonest one

*Sample Sentence:* The quick and easy process of obtaining a gun enabled him to carry out a terrible scheme.

*Turn and Talk:* Describe a scheme that would cause your teacher to dismiss class early.

**scheme** (verb) to plan something secretive or dishonest

*Sample Sentence:* The prince schemed to take over the throne by poisoning his brother.

*Turn and Talk:* How can you tell when someone is scheming?

**subsequently** (adverb) afterward

*Sample Sentence:* Thalidomide was a popular medication in the late 1950s, but it was subsequently shown to cause severe birth defects.

*Turn and Talk:* If I won the lottery, I would subsequently _________________.

**dominant** (adjective) most important or powerful; most common

*Sample Sentence:* Self-defense is one of the dominant arguments for gun ownership.

*Turn and Talk:* What is the dominant reason for you to work hard in school?

**import** (verb) to bring something into a country

*Sample Sentence:* They remind us that even if guns were made illegal in the U.S., criminals could import them from countries where guns are allowed.

*Turn and Talk:* Why might a country import a product instead of making it inside its borders?

**import** (noun) an item brought into a country for sale

*Sample Sentence:* Foreign cars are a popular import in the United States.

*Turn and Talk:* Governments often tax imports so that they cost more than products that are made locally. Why might this be the case?

**commission** (verb) to order or request something

*Sample Sentence:* The principal commissioned a report on student reading scores.

*Turn and Talk:* What kind of report about your community would you commission?

**commission** (noun) a group of people given a task

*Sample Sentence:* The commission recommended that the vice-principal be promoted to principal.

*Turn and Talk:* Would you rather join a “Save Our Parks” commission or an “End Bullying” commission? Why?
DO THE MATH

There are different dominant views about guns in different parts of the country. Some people think restrictions on guns are reasonable. Others think that the government should not interfere with the constitutional right to bear arms. Still others think that it’s okay for the government to regulate things like importing guns, but claim that any scheme to regulate personal ownership violates the Second Amendment.

**Option 1:** The Pew Research Center commissioned a poll in 2015 to find out what the dominant view was on gun control. Subsequently, the Center published the following results:

**Pew Research Center’s question:**
What do you think is more important—to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

Which of the following is true?

A. More people support gun control than oppose it.  
B. More people oppose gun control than support it.  
C. There is no way to tell which view is dominant.

**Option 2:** Within the Democratic Party, the dominant position is that guns should be regulated. Republicans are more likely to favor gun rights. A Republican strategist commissioned a study on gun control views in his home state. He found that 10% of Democrats in his state were strong supporters of gun rights. Subsequently, he devised a scheme to bring these Democrats into his own party by appealing to their feelings about gun rights. If his strategy worked, his state would have more Republicans than Democrats. If \( r = \) the number of Republicans at the time of the poll and \( d = \) the number of Democrats, which inequality is true?

A. \( .1d + r > d \)  
B. \( .1d + r > .9d \)  
C. \( r ≥ d \)  
D. \( r - d = .1d \)

**Discussion Question:** The Pew Research Center has been commissioning polls on hot topics like gun control for many years. This allows them to track changes over time in the Americans’ dominant views on controversial topics. Sometimes, subsequent to a major event like the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, people’s opinions change. What are some major events of your lifetime that may have affected people’s feelings about gun control? Which of these events may have made people more likely to support gun restrictions? Which of these events may have made people more likely to oppose gun restrictions?

**Pew Research Center:**
http://www.people-press.org/2015/08/13/continued-bipartisan-support-for-expanded-background-checks-on-gun-sales/
Different countries have different attitudes and rules about citizens carrying guns. In some countries, it is illegal for citizens to import, export, or own guns. However, in the United States, the right to bear arms is part of our Constitution. Many people feel very strongly about their right to bear arms. They suggest that the Second Amendment to the Constitution allows citizens to protect themselves from the schemes of dangerous criminals. Conversely, some people feel that more guns lead to more violence, and argue that easy access to guns increases violent crime.

Mr. Seemy’s class was debating whether access to guns makes people more likely to commit violent crimes, like murder or armed robbery. The dominant opinion in the class was that when people have guns, legal or not, more crime and violence will result. Brianna cited the tragedy at Virginia Tech as evidence that more guns will result in more violence. “Seung-Hui Cho bought a gun legally in 2007 and subsequently murdered 32 people on a college campus. Those people might be alive today if guns were illegal!”

Despite being in the minority, Lisa and Anthony spoke up in support of gun ownership. “Think about this: Those people might be alive today if one or more of them were carrying their own guns to defend themselves! More widespread gun possession could actually reduce gun murders.”

“A good scientist bases conclusions on evidence and facts, not just anecdotes and opinions,” said Mr. Seemy. “Can you find some statistics that support your opinions?”

The next day, Brianna, Lisa, and Anthony shared two sets of data from Wikipedia.

Mark which data set you think Brianna brought in, and which one Lisa and Anthony brought in.

Brianna’s claim: Murder rates correlate with gun ownership, so owning guns should be more regulated so that they are harder to get.

Lisa and Anthony’s claim: Murder rates do not correlate with gun ownership, so making guns harder to get would not do any good.

Data Set 1: This data set belongs to Brianna.

Data Set 2: This data set belongs to Lisa and Anthony.

How do you know who brought in data set 1?

highest murder rate → higher gun ownership; lowest gun ownership → lower murder rate

How do you know who brought in data set 2?

highest gun ownership → below average murder rate; lowest murder rate → gun ownership varies

How is it possible that both data tables show accurate information, but lead to different conclusions? What problems can you identify with these data? What other data would you need to make a decision about whether guns result in more murders?
SHOULD THE U.S. HAVE STRICTER GUN REGULATIONS?

DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A  □  Guns should not be regulated.

OR

B  □  Certain guns should be regulated.

OR

C  □  Guns should be illegal.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

___________________________________________________
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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

You make a good point, but have you considered...

I believe that...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

I agree with you, but...

I agree with you, but...
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

scheme | subsequently | dominant | import | commission

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