Students across the country recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily: *I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

In 2002, a father in California sued the government. He said that he did not believe in God. His daughter should not have to say “under God” in school every day. Many people agree with him. They point out that the separation of church and state is a law. This means the government cannot teach or support religion. They say this language in the Pledge is not fair. It signifies to students who do not believe in God that their belief is wrong.

Other people think that taking “under God” out of the Pledge would destroy tradition. About three-quarters of the United States population is Christian. Others follow religions like Islam and Judaism that are also based on belief in one God.

Supporters of the Pledge say the phrase does not teach a specific religion. They say it just reflects the principles of most Americans. A belief in God is part of the U.S. tradition. People swear on the Bible when they go to court. “In God We Trust” appears on our money.

The Supreme Court reached the conclusion that teachers and students who disagree with the Pledge have the right not to say it, but they did not say the Pledge should be altered.

Do you think allowing people to remain silent is an acceptable solution? Should reciting the Pledge be a requirement in schools? Or should the phrase “under God” be taken out of the Pledge of Allegiance?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

recite (verb) to speak from memory

Sample Sentence: Students across the country recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily.

Turn and Talk: If you were asked to recite a poem for English class, what steps would you take to memorize it?

allegiance (noun) loyalty

Sample Sentence: Harold feels he owes allegiance to his friends because of the help they gave him.

Turn and Talk: Describe a person, place, or idea to which you feel a strong allegiance. Why do you feel this way?

signify (verb) to mean or stand for

Sample Sentence: The American flag signifies freedom for many people.

Turn and Talk: Talk about a special (not necessarily valuable) gift you’ve received. What does this gift signify to you?

principle (noun) a rule or belief that guides actions

Sample Sentence: Supporters of the Pledge argue that it reflects the principles of most Americans.

Turn and Talk: What are three principles that are important in your life?

conclusion (noun) a final judgment or decision

Sample Sentence: The Supreme Court reached the conclusion that teachers and students who disagree with the Pledge have the right not to say it.

Turn and Talk: Think of a time when an adult decided that you had broken a rule. Did you agree with the adult’s conclusion?
Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is meant to bring Americans together. The conclusion of the Pledge, “with liberty and justice for all,” refers to two important American principles: the right to personal freedom and the right to be treated fairly.

“Under God” was added in 1954, during America’s Cold War with the Soviet Union. This addition was meant to signify that, unlike the Soviet Union, America was a religious nation. To many people, this addition makes sense. Historically, America has primarily been a religious nation. Most Americans are religious believers. But what about atheists? Does the “liberty” promised at the end of the Pledge mean that all Americans, including atheists, should be free to say the Pledge without saying something they don’t believe?

This circle graph shows the results of an AP-Ipsos Public Affairs poll taken in March of 2004.

Option 1: Which of the following statements is true?

A. Most Americans want “under God” removed from the Pledge.
B. Most Americans have no opinion.
C. There are 7 Americans who want to keep “under God” for every one American who wants it removed.
D. There are 9 Americans who want to keep “under God” for every one American who wants it removed.

Option 2: Three Americans have been selected at random. What is the probability that all three are in favor of keeping “under God” in the Pledge?

Discussion Question: The separation of church and state is an important American principle. Some say that asking students to recite a daily Pledge of Allegiance that includes God is wrong. They say it signifies an attack on religious freedom. Is this the right conclusion? Or is the Pledge more about history and tradition than about religious belief? Eighty-seven percent of Americans want to keep “under God” in the Pledge. Do you think these Americans are motivated mostly by feelings about religion, or mostly by feelings about history and tradition? Why?
Ms. Kahn’s class is discussing whether the phrase “under God” should be included in the Pledge of Allegiance.

“The Pledge was created over 100 years ago, so we should just keep it as it is because it’s a tradition,” said Rafael.

“Well, my grandmother told me that the Pledge of Allegiance she recited when she was young was a little bit different,” says Cory. “Since it has changed at least once, that means it can be changed again!”

“There must have been a reason for it to change. I wonder what it is?” Tyler questioned.

“There have actually been several different versions since it was first created in 1892,” explained Ms. Kahn. “Let’s look to see if we can figure out what has changed.”

Francis Bellamy originally worded the Pledge so that anyone in the world could recite it. The additions made in 1923 and 1924 were meant to signify to immigrants the importance of staying loyal to their new country. If you were going to research the reason for the change in 1954, what information would help you to come to a conclusion?

About 60 years have passed since the last change was made to the Pledge, the longest amount of time without change since its creation in 1892. With your classmates, discuss why you think no recent changes have been made.
DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A
☐ The phrase “under God” should stay in the Pledge of Allegiance.

B
☐ The phrase “under God” should not stay in the Pledge of Allegiance.

OR
☐ ________________

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:

• “Can you show me evidence in the text that...”
• “I believe that...”
• “You make a good point, but have you considered...”
• “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.

recite | allegiance | signify | principle | conclusion