Topic : Puerto Rico, the 51st state ?
AXE 6: English-speaking areas of America

KEY QUESTION: How do Puerto Ricans live between their island and the USA? How does Puerto Rico's ambiguous status shape the lives, identities and political choices of Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland?

LESSON 5
To be or not to be a state?

Key question : Should Puerto Rico become the 51st state of the United States?Part 1 –

Part 1 : Warm-up (5 min)
Think-Pair-Share

Question:

If you were a Puerto Rican voter, would you choose:

❑ Statehood? ❑ Independence? ❑ The current status?

You must justify your choice using:

• political rights • cultural identity • economy • citizenship

Part 2 – Reading the Numbers: Referendums on Puerto Rico's Status (10 min)

Document 1: Referendum Results : üerto Rico's political status choices over time

REFERENDUMS ON PUERTO RICO'S POLITICAL STATUS					
Year	**Statehood**	**Independence**	**Free association (sovereign nation, but US citizenship)**	**Commonwealth (today's status)**	**None of the above**
1967	38,98 %	0,60 %	-	60,41 %	-
1993	46,64 %	4,47 %	-	48,89 %	-
1998	46,63 %	2,55%	0,29 %	0,06 %	50,46 %[1]
2012	61,16 %	5,49 %	33,34 %	-	-
2017[2]	97,18 %	1,50%[3]		1,32 %	-
2020	52,52 %	-	-	-	47,48 %
2025	58,48 %	29,35 %	12,17 %	-	-

[1] The Popular Democratic Party (PDP), saying the referendum language for the Commonwealth option was misleading.
[2] The PDP boycotted the referendum, resulting in a voter turnout of only 22,93%
[3] The ballot question treated free association and independence as the same option.

Questions
1- What trend can you observe?

2- Why do more voters seem to support statehood today?

3- Which political status option has shown the most consistent support over time, and what trends can be observed in voter preferences?

4-Does a majority in a referendum automatically mean Puerto Rico will become a state?

Part 3 – Video Activity

Forbes Video: Members of Congress Speak on the House Floor (2022)
Context
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbJs7Qps1OM
«**AOC: 'For First Time... The United States Will Acknowledge Its Role As A Colonizing Force' »**
Forbes Breaking News

1- Read the title. With your classmate, guess what the video is about and makes the situation exceptional.

2- While Watching, find expressions related to:
democracy : citizenship: equality:
representation : colonialism:

3- Watch the first minute. Give a definition of the Puerto Rico Status Act using the following words : bill – future – Boricuas – citizenship – ramifications – representation

4- Listen and fill in the grid

Speakers	Main ideas
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	
Supporters of Statehood	
Supporters of Self-Determination	

5- Use the Culture Tip and the video to analyse AOC's words : "I also want to note that decolonisation is more than a vote."

6- ***One minute challenge!*** Explain why this act is historic for Puerto Rico.

7- **Discussion**
Why do some members of Congress call Puerto Rico a colony?

Part 4 – Rep. Richie Torres takes a stand on statehood and the status quo

"The people of Puerto Rico have consistently voted for statehood, only to have their express will ignored by Congress, which cannot be bothered to care about the disenfranchisement of more than 3 million American citizens on the island," Congressman Ritchie Torres (D-NY) wrote yesterday at X. […]

Rep. Torres, who represents a congressional district in the Bronx that is home to more Puerto Ricans than almost any other member of Congress […] concluded the conversation by saying, "If you think it is morally acceptable to deprive 3 million American citizens of equal representation in Congress, equal funding from the federal budget, and an equal right to vote in presidential elections, then you and I simply have a different set of values."

Torres's reference to disenfranchisement is poignant. The residents of Puerto Rico are literally disenfranchised because they cannot vote in presidential elections, they have no senators, and they are represented by only one, non-voting Member in the House of Representatives. Puerto Ricans cannot vote for the congressional representatives who make their laws, as other U.S. citizens can. […]



Although a commenter makes the case that "taking away one of the most popular options from the vote which is the status quo" is colonialism, the facts tell a different story. The "status quo," which is Puerto Rico's current status as a U.S. territory, is deeply unpopular in Puerto Rico. […]

A "commonwealth" option had received more votes back in 1967 (60.4%) and 1993 (48.6%), but this "commonwealth" ballot option did not represent the status quo. It was, instead, an aspirational concept to give Puerto Rico more rights while still remaining a U.S. territory, an idea that has been soundly rejected over the years. […]

This unpopularity, combined with the increased recognition that Puerto Rico's current status is colonial and inconsistent with U.S. democratic values, underpins the decision to leave the status quo – sometimes referred to as "commonwealth" – off the ballot in the last two referendum votes.

Puerto Rico Report, 2024

1- Read the title and note down your ideas about its topic and content.

2- Pick out the words related to "politics" which present Torres and his message.

3- Focus on the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs to identify the three major problems facing Puerto Ricans today.

NOW SAY WHAT THE TEXT IS ABOUT? (B1)

4- In the 1st paragraph, spot words and phrases that help infer how Torres feels about Congress.

5- In "If you think…values"(l.10-14), explain Torres's strategy in using "you" and repeating "equal".

6- Concentrate on the last three paragraphs and determine the author's position in the debate.

CONNECT THE DOTS! Present the current debate about Puerto Rico's political status and democratic representation.

Part 6 – Debate (15 min)

Role Play

Group A: Pro-Statehood

Use:

- equal rights
- voting rights
- representation in Congress
- federal funding

Group B: Pro-Independence

Use:

- national identity
- culture
- self-government
- decolonization

Group C: Keep the Current Status

Use:

- U.S. citizenship
- local autonomy
- economic concerns

Aide méthodologique

Use at least:

-2 arguments
-1 counter-argument
-1 expression of agreement or disagreement
- 1 conditional sentence ("If Puerto Rico became a state, it would…"