



2026 Academic WorldQuest Study Guide Topics and Descriptions

Academic WorldQuest inspires a culture of global engagement
in schools across the United States

1. Pop Culture and Soft Power in International Relations - In 1990, scholar Joseph Nye coined the term “soft power” to refer to how countries can influence others with means other than military force. Pop culture, broadly defined as popular mass media, has emerged as a potent form of soft power. Through this topic, you will explore how pop culture influences international relations, including as an exercise of soft power. You will also engage with contemporary instances of pop culture influencing global politics, its ability to change global attitudes in the internet age, and how countries like the US and China have recently shifted their cultural soft power approaches.

2. The FIFA World Cup - Since its founding in 1904, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has strengthened the international ties of the soccer community. The World Cup’s unparalleled popularity often provides a significant economic and cultural draw to host countries, cities, and communities – especially relevant in 2026 given that the USA, Canada, and Mexico will share tournament hosting duties. This topic familiarizes you with some of soccer’s roles in international relations. You will also explore some controversies surrounding the largest global athletic event after the Olympics.

3. Migration and Immigration - Human movement is a phenomenon as old as history. But migration (movement of people across international borders) is a topic with heightened significance today. According to the United Nations, more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born. Immigration (movement into a country) and emigration (movement out of a country) are motivated by a host of factors. Delve into these “push” and “pull” factors shaping our world, as well as the effects of large-scale migration on countries and people affected.

4. The US Constitution and Foreign Policy - The question of how the Constitution shapes U.S. foreign policy is a rich one, with debates about constitutional power over foreign affairs as old as the nation. The Constitution makes the President the Commander in Chief, but gives Congress the ability to declare war. In this topic, especially relevant as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, you will study the history of these debates, as well as how constitutional concerns affect the modern foreign policy landscape. You will also examine to what extent values enshrined in the Constitution (democracy, human rights, and the rule of law) influence U.S. foreign policy.

5. The Belt and Road Initiative - In 2013, China launched an ambitious foreign economic development program titled One Belt, One Road (later renamed Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI for short). While historically the Chinese Communist Party prioritized self-reliance rather than engagement with the international community, in recent years China has pivoted to global engagement to expand economic influence and access to markets. Through this topic you will become familiar with the geopolitical implications of this policy, its economic effects on China and the rest of the world, and how the United States is reacting to China’s increasing role on the world stage.

6. Tariffs and Trade - Since the end of the Second World War, openness to free international trade has increased markedly. More countries have signed agreements to allow free exchanges, and entities like the World Trade Organization have lowered trading barriers and increased the flow of capital and goods across borders. Some countries have maintained trade barriers consistently, while other countries have restricted once-free trade to protect domestic industries and jobs. In this topic, you will research tariffs, a signature tool used to raise trade barriers, as well as how attitudes towards global trade are changing in today’s geopolitical landscape.

7. Coffee and Chocolate: A Global Perspective - Coffee and chocolate are extremely lucrative goods whose trade is highly sought after. At the same time, concerns have developed surrounding those who farm these products and the environmental impact of these industries. Through this topic, you will research aspects of coffee and chocolate production, as well as efforts to institute ethical trade and consumption of these goods. You will also explore how COVID-19 affected the trade of coffee and chocolate.

8. Nuclear Policy Issues - Nuclear power occupies a prominent place in the public consciousness. Atomic bombs and radiation are often the first terms that accompany a discussion of the word “nuclear,” but nuclear power is a much wider concept. In this topic, you will study how nuclear weapons factor into military strategy for the US and other nations, and efforts to prevent the spread of dangerous nuclear technology or even abolish nuclear weapons entirely. You will also explore civilian applications of nuclear power and debates over whether nuclear energy can meaningfully combat climate change.

9. Focus Country: Australia - The Commonwealth of Australia is both the smallest continent on Earth and one of the largest countries on the planet. While the government has its roots in British penal colony administration, Australia has a rich pre-European history; Australia's indigenous peoples have lived on the land for more than 60,000 years. Today, Australia boasts a proudly multicultural population as a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. Through this topic, you will navigate an overview of the Australian state, its contemporary politics and culture, and the U.S.-Australia relationship.

10. Current Events - This yearly dive into the world of the news tests your knowledge of what's happening around the globe and to help you spot larger trends in these events. The two required sources in the box below provide different yet complementary perspectives, helping you think more critically about information you encounter. Understanding the narrative arcs of current events assists in making more informed choices, joining in on important discussions as young leaders, and deciding how to contribute to your community most effectively.

Please note: 1. Questions for the local Indiana competition may be chosen from articles appearing in the two sources from September – November 2025. Please consult your local Council for confirmation of source and date range. **Note: Indiana confirms.**

2. Questions for the National Competition in April 2026 will be chosen from articles having appeared in the two sources from January – March 2026.

Current Events - Round Sources

GlobalPost: GlobalPost's Global Education Initiative provides free subscriptions to college and high school students around the world. GlobalPost's mission is to promote greater knowledge of the world and to help shape the next generation of well-educated citizens of both this country and the wider world. Sign up today at: <https://globalpost.com/signup/>. Optional: Educators can also download a new Study Guide to help incorporate GlobalPost into classrooms for free here: <https://globalpost.com/education/#study-guide>.

The Financial Times: Schools/teachers must first register at www.ft.com/schoolsarefree/. Once verified, they will enjoy free access to www.ft.com, ideally creating individual accounts using their official email allowing them to read the FT online/remotely. The FT covers international affairs and politics as well as business, economics, culture, and more at this link: www.ft.com/world. Optional: In addition, the Financial Times recommends the FirstFT quiz on current affairs coverage: <https://www.ft.com/content/de1faad0-36a5-4583-97e8-51505c210cca>. It is associated with the FT's daily free news round-up email FirstFT.

Source: World Affairs Councils of America, Global Education. October 2, 2025.

[2026 Academic WorldQuest Study Guide – World Affairs Councils of America](#)



The Indiana Council on World Affairs' Academic WorldQuest is scheduled for February 14, 2026, at the University of Indianapolis. All high schools in Indiana are eligible, free-of-charge Registration is open: [Indiana Council on World Affairs - Academic WorldQuest 2026 - Registration Open & Study Guide Posted. Competition on \(wildapricot.org\)](#)