

Big6 and the CIA: Intelligence is Information

What do Big6ers have in common with CIA agents?

Step-by-Step Process / Information / Report Writing / Analysis / Evaluation / Teamwork

Do you like to read mysteries, watch espionage programs, and unravel puzzles? Do you ever watch dramatic TV programs like “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation,” follow Jack Bauer’s CTU (Central Terrorism Unit) fictional encounters on the TV series *24*, or do you occasionally imagine yourself in the role of “M”, James Bond’s boss and mentor?

Although all of these programs represent different law enforcement divisions (and in the case of 007, a different country altogether), they have one thing in common: they all depict ways that information is used to solve high-stakes information problems. Furthermore, these fictional heroes have real-world counterparts who do the same kind of problem solving – the [CIA \(Central Intelligence Agency\)](#).

Although the CIA has a reputation of mystery and covert operations, their approach to solving information problems is actually quite familiar. On a recent tour of the CIA’s website, I discovered some startling information. Did you know the CIA uses a step-by-step process to solve problems, much like Big6ers do? Hey! A problem-solving agency! How does the CIA’s problem-solving strategy compare to the Big6 problem-solving strategy? How are the strategies similar, and how are they different?

Step-by-Step Process

Both Big6 and CIA use a step-by-step process. The CIA uses a problem-solving strategy called the [Intelligence Cycle](#), described on the CIA Kids’ Pages for grades 6-12. For the CIA, intelligence means information. Therefore, a CIA worker who gathers intelligence is gathering information.

Free Educational Resources on CIA Website

The CIA website offers a kid friendly Kids’ Page with special sections written for grades K-5, 6-12, and Parents and Teachers. Teachers will find free lesson plans, and students may try code breaking games, puzzles, the CIA museum virtual tour, and lots more fun activities. There are even career planning tips for older students who may ponder the choice of problem-solving for a living.

The Kids’ Pages lead to Parents and Teachers section where you’ll find Lesson Plans and Teacher Resources for upper middle school and high school. The site features a [list](#) of the lessons, which may be used within the standard curriculum.

Role Play CIA!

The CIA contains departments that handle and specialize in each stage in the intelligence cycle. Here is a lesson suggestion that you might adapt to use with middle to high school level students.

Objective and Purpose:

Students will understand that problem-solving skills are relevant in the “real world.” Students will benefit from an opportunity to consider and approach complex problems, and will have practice working in a team setting. Students will learn how to incorporate effective Big6 strategies to gather and organize information in the problem-solving process. Big6 Skill building exercise.

Context for Use:

Grades 4 - 7; World History, English Language Arts Creative Writing, Career Exploration or Team Building exercises

Pre-Teaching:

Review Team Roles. Combine team functions if that works better in your situation.

Team One - Policy Maker Team: Our Policy Maker/s will present an information-based problem to solve. (Sue, what might be some examples of problems? Maybe preventing graffiti in the school? Or helping the cafeteria to choose a new entrée? I am thinking an example might help). Policy Maker/s will suggest a problem to solve and prepare to evaluate the results of the final report from the other teams. If the final report does not fully answer the posed question, or if the research brings more questions to light - the intelligence gathering process will begin again.) Determine what the Policy maker will accept as evidence that each team has done their part to solve the problem. Policy Maker might develop an effective rubric along with Team Two members to help all teams know how well they are meeting the overall goals. (Big6 1.1, 1.2 Task Definition role)

Team Two: This team will handle Planning and Direction (Read, Plan, and Develop a Strategy and Approach to solve the assigned task). How many sources, which sources, what format and so forth, will be necessary to solve the problem posed by Policy Maker? (Big6 2.1, 2.2 Information Seeking Strategies role.)

Team Three: Researchers: Members collect relevant information to share with Team 4. (Seekers / Researchers) Seekers must find the information in the sources, read and extract the relevant information to present to Team Four Writers. (Big6 3.1, 3.2 Location and Access role; Big6 4.1, 4.2 Use of Information role.)

Team Four: Writers/Processing team must put together the information bits to share with Team 5. Also for review by teams 2 and 3. (Writers) (Big6 5.1, Organize from multiple sources.)

Team Five: The Analysis and Production team thinks about how the information fits together to solve the original problem, and considers possible reasons for the problem and predict what might happen next. The Analysis and Production Team will write a report based upon the information from the Processing Team. (Big6 5.1, 5.2 Synthesis; 6.1, 6.2 Evaluation) [You might group teams Four and Five together since their functions are similar.]

Team Six: Dissemination team must design, print, and deliver the final report to the Policy Maker (Creative Designers, Presentation Specialists, Secure Document Delivery-Courier Service) The presentation should be easy to read, easy to understand, and include visual elements as decided by Team Two members. Creativity counts. (Big6 5.1, 5.2 Synthesis; 6.1, 6.2 Evaluation)

Ideas for Teaching and Learning:**CIA: Hire Me!**

Role Play Costume: To introduce this assignment, the instructor might dress like a CIA agent – wear dark glasses and a plain, dark suit jacket.. Use a stencil to print “CONFIDENTIAL” in large letters on the file folder to present the activity scenario to the class. You may modify this lesson in any way that will fit your teaching situation.

Select a current world topic from CNN online, newspaper articles, and so forth. Gather credible information, read, research, evaluate and write a persuasive report with details about how your topic might affect our country’s interests for the next 25 years.

Students may work in the CIA team method and divide the responsibilities up by departments, or an individual student may work alone.

Sample Topic Ideas:

Needs some examples to get started? Here are some sample topics:

World Pollution Issues in the News

Air Pollution in Beijing, China: China is preparing to host the Olympic games, but the air quality is so poor in Beijing that world athletes may have problems breathing well, therefore having an effect on athletic performance. China is taking measures to reduce air pollution at least in the short term. What effect will a change in air pollution levels have on China, the rest of the world, and pollution policies around the world for the next 25 years?

New Runway at Heathrow?: Officials propose airport expansions near Heathrow airport to accommodate runway needs at the main, overburdened Heathrow airfield. Local people protest the effect a new airport runway may have on Harmondsworth, England and the rest of the surrounding area, or world. How might an expansion at Heathrow affect or not affect United States interests in the next 25 years?

International Shipping and World Trade:

International shipping vessels need space to dock in world ports to load and unload cargo. Identify three dominant issues that will affect international shipping in the next 25 years, and recommend three options to prepare for these needs.

Points to consider:

- Who stands to gain or lose from a given issue and why?
- Does the situation encourage or discourage international trade or influence world markets?
- Does the situation affect a political situation that might create an advantage or disadvantage?
- Does the situation highlight an environmental issue that might have an international impact - for whom, why or why not?

Gather and document credible information, read, research, evaluate and write a report with details to consider how environmental changes might affect our country's interests for the next 25 years.

Need a method to organize complex questions?

Here is an information gathering and sorting grid Bob Berkowitz suggests - he calls it Bob's Boxes. Have students create a grid that includes all the variables down one side and across the top, as is shown in this [sample](#). Students will learn how to pick out the essential parts of a question and look for information that will address that specific question.

Remind students that real-world examples of problem-solving do exist! The CIA is one team devoted to providing good quality information to decision makers and policy makers. Credible information is essential for the US and the world, because the stakes for peace and good health are very high. Students who are familiar with a process like Big6 for school work will have a much easier transition to when they use the Big6 to solve information-based situations at work someday. Maybe even some of your students will consider working for an information agency, like the CIA!

"Intelligence is Information" - CIA.