

# News Debate: Sew Long?

*Students debate the merits of home ec courses.*

Home economics courses have been sliced and diced in recent years, as school districts search for ways to reduce their budgets. Some schools have replaced home ec courses with classes in other subjects. For example, this year, schools in Maplewood and South Orange, N.J., traded their home ec classes for a new computer technology program.

For much of the 20th century, home ec courses were devoted to teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household. Over the years, the courses began welcoming both male and female students. They also came to include a wider range of topics, such as personal finance.

Even though home ec courses have evolved, some argue that their content is either outdated or common sense. They believe that schools should instead focus on subjects such as science, math, and social studies. Others think home ec classes should remain part of school curricula. They argue that the skills taught in home ec help prepare students for adulthood.

Should schools teach home economics courses? *Current Events* student reporters Peter Brosnan and Elizabeth Duis each served up a side.

## Keep Cooking

Home economics classes are key ingredients in the recipe for well-rounded, independent students. "Home economics is more than the stereotypical courses of cooking and sewing," Michele Brophy, a home and career skills teacher at Mildred E. Strang Middle School in Yorktown Heights, N.Y., says. "Home ec teaches today's youth how to make good choices in all aspects of their daily lives."

Home ec courses can also stir up student interest in nutrition and healthy eating. Learning to prepare healthy food can help address the obesity problem facing teens. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18 percent of teenagers qualified as obese in the 2007–2008 school year.

Finally, many students do not have the opportunity to learn such skills at home. Parents who work full-time jobs, for example, often struggle to find time to teach their kids the skills taught in home ec classes. Susan Gilberti,

another home and career skills teacher at Strang Middle School, says, "These are skills we all need for the rest of our lives."

## For The Dustbin

I agree with the decision to do away with home economics programs. First of all, it's the parents' responsibility over all others to teach their children the basic skills taught in home ec classes. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and managing finances can be learned around the house and do not need to take up classroom time.

Second, because the skills that home ec courses teach are no longer as important as they once were, schools could save money by cutting the programs. Kelly Gruhn, a former math teacher at Watseka High School in Illinois, agrees. "[Home ec courses] cost schools too much extra money that schools nowadays can't afford," says Gruhn.

Last but not least, our country should be devoting resources to subjects such as math and science. Students in the United States lag behind students in many other countries in those areas. Focusing our attention on educating students in subjects of worldwide importance would be a good decision for all of us.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How have home ec courses evolved over time?

- A They are now open to both female and male students.
- B They now include a wider range of topics.
- C Both answers A and B
- D Neither answer A or B

2. In presenting both sides of the argument, the article which of the following statements about home ec

- A Home ec can increase student interest in nutrition and healthy eating.
- B Home ec should be taught at home by parents.
- C Schools could save money by cutting home ec courses.
- D all of the above

3. One reason presented for cutting home ec is that our country should be devoting more resources to studying math and science. What can you infer from that argument?

- A American students are the best in the world at math and science.
- B American students are not as successful as they should be in math and science.
- C There is already plenty of money and time spent on studying math and science in the United States.
- D There is enough time and money for students to study anything they want.

4. Read the following sentence: "For much of the 20th century, home ec courses were devoted to teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household."

In this sentence the word **devoted** means

- A religious
- B committed
- C helpful
- D designed

5. What would another good title be for this passage?

- A Bring Back Home Ec!
- B How to Sew in School
- C Send Home Ec Home!
- D Home Ec: Up for Debate

6. What was the main goal or purpose of home economics courses during the bulk of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

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7. Why might a school eliminate their home ec courses and replace them with a computer technology program?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Jake’s mother first made him take a home ec course \_\_\_\_\_ she let him use her fancy sewing machine.

- A after
- B whenever
- C so
- D before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

David couldn’t finish sewing his stuffed dinosaur in home ec class because he had the flu.

Who? David

What? \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word:** finance (fi · nance): money.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **finance**.

1. I went to the bank to have them help me with my finances.
2. I try to save money so I don't get into trouble with my finances.
3. My brother works in the finance department at his company and helps monitor the company's spendings and earnings.
4. I'd like to make a donation to your organization to help with your after-school program's finances, so here is a check for \$100.
5. Home ec courses began to teach students about personal finance: keeping track of their spending and saving money.

10b. Which picture below most likely represents a place you would visit to manage your finances?



11. Some people have jobs as Financial Planners. Based on what you know about the definition of finance, what do you think a Financial Planner might do for work?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 1150

**Featured Text Structure:** Argumentative – the writer presents evidence for both sides of an argument.

**Passage Summary:** In the article “News Debate: Sew Long?”, student authors look at the issue of home economics (home ec) courses in schools. After providing a brief history of home ec coursework in schools, the authors present evidence both in favor of and against the inclusion of home ec courses in school curricula.

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- C **Both answers A and B**
- D Neither answer A or B

2. In presenting both sides of the argument, the article which of the following statements about home ec

- A Home ec can increase student interest in nutrition and healthy eating.
- B Home ec should be taught at home by parents.
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- D **all of the above**

3. One reason presented for cutting home ec is that our country should be devoting more resources to studying math and science. What can you infer from that argument?

- A American students are the best in the world at math and science.
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- C There is already plenty of money and time spent on studying math and science in the United States.
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4. Read the following sentence: “For much of the 20th century, home ec courses were devoted to teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household.”

In this sentence the word **devoted** means

- A religious
- B **committed**
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5. What would another good title be for this passage?

- A Bring Back Home Ec!
- B How to Sew in School
- C Send Home Ec Home!
- D **Home Ec: Up for Debate**

6. What was the main goal or purpose of home economics courses during the bulk of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

**Suggested answer:** Teaching girls to sew, cook, and run an organized household. [paragraph #2]

7. Why might a school eliminate their home ec courses and replace them with a computer technology program?

**Suggested answer:** To train students in technology skills, which may be more applicable in a “global economy” and/or may be a subject area with more “worldwide importance” [last paragraph]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

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- A after
- B whenever
- C so
- D before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

David couldn’t finish sewing his stuffed dinosaur in home ec class because he had the flu.

Who? David

What? **couldn’t finish sewing his stuffed dinosaur**

Where? **in home ec class**

Why? **he had the flu**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

**Vocabulary Word:** finance

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (fi · nance)
- b. Teacher says: “This word is finance. What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “finance.”]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: “Finance is a word that means having to do with money. When we talk about our finances, we’re talking about our money – what we earn and what we spend.”
- b. Teacher says: “In the passage, the author states that home ec courses have evolved over the years to include a wider range of topics, such as personal finance.”
- c. Teacher says: “What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “finance.”]

**Step 3:** Practice the word

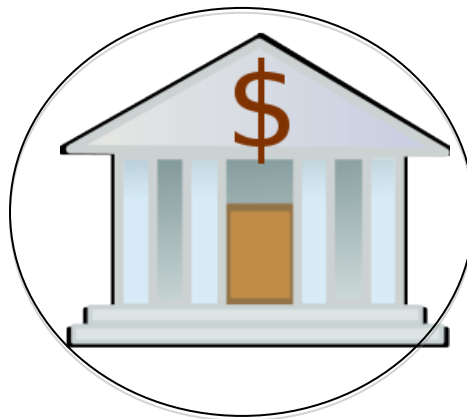
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. I went to the bank to have them help me with my finances.
  2. I try to save money so I don't get into trouble with my finances.
  3. My brother works in the finance department at his company and helps monitor the company's spendings and earnings.
  4. I'd like to make a donation to your organization to help with your after-school program's finances, so here is a check for \$100.
  5. Home ec courses began to teach students about personal finance: keeping track of their spending and saving money.

**Step 4:** Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which picture below most likely represents a place you would visit to manage your finances?



- 11.** Some people have jobs as Financial Planners. Based on what you know about the definition of finance, what do you think a Financial Planner might do for work?

**Suggested answer:** A Financial Planner helps people plan and manage their money and assets.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:* obesity, devoted, managing, stereotypical