

# Coin Toss?



## Americans debate the pros and cons of the penny

**A**re pennies more trouble than they're worth? The manager of one Dunkin' Donuts thought so. "We will be rounding your change to the nearest nickel," read a sign recently posted at the doughnut shop. "If your change is \$2.03, we will give you \$2.05. If your change is \$2.22, you will receive \$2.20."

Why drop the penny? That's what many of the store's customers wanted to know. Pretty soon, the experiment was over.

Too bad, says a group called Citizens for Retiring the Penny. Otherwise, customers might have gotten their doughnuts faster.

The group estimates that if cashiers didn't have to count pennies, they could save about two seconds per customer. That translates to four hours per worker per year.

But, the group adds, pennies aren't just a waste of time. They're also a waste of money. Made mostly of zinc, each penny now costs nearly two cents to produce.

To add insult to injury, many of those pennies go unused. According to one survey, the average household has \$93.75 worth of pennies lying around—on kitchen counters, in glass jars, and underneath sofa cushions. That means about \$10.5 billion of currency is idle. (If that inspires you to cash in your stray pennies, you might need help getting them to the bank: \$100 worth of one-cent coins weighs more than 60 pounds.)



Australia, Canada, the U.K., and other countries have already phased out their smallest coins. Should the U.S. do the same?

Many Americans say no. People like pennies, and they want the government to keep making them. Maybe they're just used to having them lying around in their bureau drawers.

But there's more to like about the penny besides nostalgia, says Americans for Common Cents. The pro-penny group claims that many businesses might round *up* to the nearest nickel, not down, costing consumers about \$600 million a year.

That may sound like a lot, but it's only \$2 per person—the amount often charged for one ATM transaction. Unless people can think of better reasons to keep the penny, its days may be numbered.

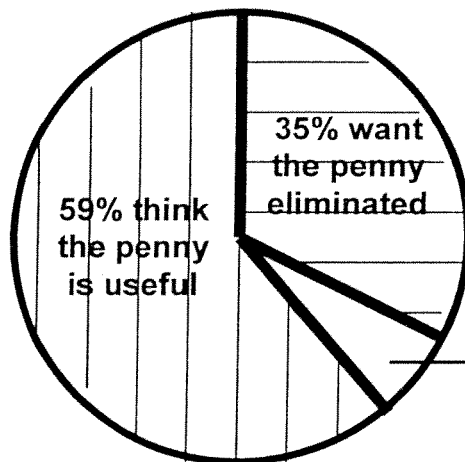
PHOTO: WALTER DUNN/GETTY IMAGES; PHOTO: WALTER DUNN/GETTY IMAGES

**Social Studies – Grade 6****INQUIRY AND DECISION MAKING**

**Directions:** Read the following information about a public policy issue. Use it with what you know to complete the task that follows.

**GET RID OF THE PENNY?**

A bill currently before the U.S. Congress has the government considering getting rid of the penny. Thanks to a rise in metal prices, it now costs the U.S. Mint 1.23 cents to make the penny. Inflation, or rising costs, show that it takes about 7 cents to buy what 1-penny bought in 1956. Since many people do not bother to use the coin, roughly \$1 billion worth of pennies are out of circulation. You cannot deposit pennies in parking meters or vending machines, and penny candy is a thing of the past. Many people believe the penny just collects dust and rattles around in the bottom of pockets and drawers. Just look in your piggy bank or bedroom drawer to find some of them. U.S. Representatives are sponsoring legislation that would phase out the penny over the next five years. If this bill becomes a law, eventually all money transactions will be rounded to the nearest nickel. Supporters say this will save precious time at supermarket and convenience store checkout lines. But a recent *USA Today* survey found that more than half of Americans favor keeping the penny, in which they say still serves a purpose. In recent years, for instance, charities have collected pennies as a way of raising money for worthy causes. Study the data below about the use of the penny.

**Public Opinion Poll About the Penny***SOURCE: USA Today*

6% do not care what happens with the penny

The table below shows reasons the legislature is considering on whether to eliminate or continue the use of the penny.

**Eliminate or Continue the Penny?**

Reasons to Stop Production	Reasons to Continue Production
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Few items cost a penny.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Many jobs in the zinc industry that produces the penny and the transportation industry that delivers the penny would be lost</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 66% of all pennies are not even in circulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People could end up paying more for items and taxes with rounded up costs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People are leaving their pennies at cash registers more and more often.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It is a part of American heritage; it is a symbol of respect to Abraham Lincoln who is on the coin</li> </ul>

Name

Date

# Looking at Both Sides

In most debate issues, you will see reasons for or against the topic. As you read the debate, keep track of both sides by filling in the graphic organizer below.

Debate Topic: <b>Get Rid of the Penny ?</b>	
For/Yes	Against/No

## Social Studies

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### COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING TASK

#### Task 1: Taking a Stand

You will now take a stand on the following public policy issue.

#### **Should the United States government eliminate the use of the penny?**

You may either support or oppose the elimination of the penny. Think about what your style of government allows you to do and not do. Write a letter to a member of Congress. Use information from the data on the previous page and from information you have learned to provide reasons based on fact(s) that support your position.

You will be graded on the following criteria. Your letter must include:

- A clear and supported statement of your position
- Supporting information from the Data Section *and* knowledge you have learned
- Supporting information using a core democratic value of American constitutional (representative) democracy

#### **Some Core Democratic Values of Democracy**

Life  
Liberty/freedom  
The Pursuit of Happiness  
Common Good  
Justice  
Equality  
Diversity  
Truth  
Popular Sovereignty/Vote  
Patriotism  
Individual Rights

PRACTICE PROMPT – ESSAY FORMAT

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**P**

In my opinion, \_\_\_\_\_ should or  
should not (choose one) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. According to the data,

**D**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.  
The reading states that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**D**

I learned that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.  
This relates to my position because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**C**

A democratic value that supports my position is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**♥**

In conclusion, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.