

INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE LEARNING



AGENDA

- What's a Service Learning Project?
- What's Going On?
- Making Up Your Mind

Objectives

Students will define “service learning project.”

Students will identify issues and problems that they perceive in their communities.

Students will select an issue to address in a service learning project.

Materials Needed

- One or two dictionaries (Part I)
- Articles about young people or celebrities who've done service projects and/or a guest speaker who can describe a personal experience with a service project (Part II)
- One large sheet of paper and marker per group (Part II)

Part I What's a Service Learning Project?

Purpose: Students define “service learning project.”

1. STUDENTS INTERPRET A QUOTE ABOUT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

Display the following quote on the board:

“If you want your neighborhood clean, sweep the front of your steps and maybe the house on the left and the right. If you don’t want graffiti, paint over the graffiti that’s close to you. If you don’t want it to be so noisy, you try being quiet. You’ve got to treat others the way you want to be treated.” —LL Cool J

Ask students to interpret this quote. Ask if it applies to their communities. Elicit from students that the quote suggests that people have the power to improve their communities, no matter what its problems are. Ask if they have ever heard the last sentence before.

2. STUDENTS DEFINE “SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT.”

Ask students to brainstorm the meanings of the words “service” and “learning.” Ask a volunteer to write students’ definitions on the board.

Ask two other volunteers to look in the dictionary for the definitions of these words. Invite these volunteers to read aloud the definitions they find, and to write them under or next to the suggested definitions. (Students should respond: Service is work done for another or for a community; it is assistance or benefit given. Learning is knowledge acquired by study.)

Ask the class to use this information to make an educated guess about what a service learning project is. Discuss their definition, and explain that a service learning project is one in which the participants choose to do a project that provides a service to the community. Explain the difference between service learning and community service. Tell students that the participants in a service learning project are guided by a teacher to practice and use a set of skills that they have learned.

Part II What's Going On?

Purpose: Students consider service learning topics by learning about and discussing other service learning/community service projects.

1. STUDENTS READ ARTICLES OR LISTEN TO A PRESENTATION ABOUT OTHER PROJECTS.

Provide each student with a copy of an article about a service learning project executed by a young person or by a person who is well known to your students. Allow students a few minutes to read the article. If a person who has been closely involved in a community project is available to speak to the class, invite them to describe the project and the work it accomplished.

Encourage students to write down comments or questions while listening to the speaker. Have them ask their questions after the speaker's presentation.

2. STUDENTS DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE READ OR HEARD.

Organize students into groups of three or four. Give each group a large piece of paper and a marker. Assign each group questions such as the following to answer:

- Who is the focus of the article/the guest's speech? What did this person do?
- Where does this person live?
- What prompted this person/group to act? What would you have done in their position?
- What issue is the focus of the article/speech? Why did this person/group choose to address this particular issue?
- What did the person/group do to address the issue?
- What are the plans for follow-up? Is this an ongoing project?

Circulate through the room while students are working and write down striking statements.

3. STUDENTS REPORT THEIR ANSWERS TO THE WHOLE CLASS.

Facilitate a brief discussion on the information students have read or heard, encouraging them to offer their opinions on the project described, the issue it addressed, and the participants' overall experience. Read aloud the statements that you overheard while students were working.

Part III Making Up Your Mind

Purpose: Students discuss issues in their own communities and choose a topic for their service learning project(s).

1. STUDENTS SHARE THEIR OPINIONS.

Ask students to respond to some or all of the following questions:

- What problems do you see in your town, state, or country?
- What do you think are the "hot" issues in your community and in your school?
- What things do you wish were different in your community and your school?
- How do you think people perceive your community and your school?
- How do you think most people perceive adolescents? Do you think their perception is a realistic one?

Write their responses on the board.

2. STUDENTS DELVE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE ISSUES THEY'VE IDENTIFIED.

Focusing on the top five issues that generated the most interest, facilitate a discussion of the details surrounding the issues that students have identified. Ask questions such as these:

- Who is involved in this issue?
- What specifically would help to alleviate the issue or problem?
- What are some things you could do that would lead to that help?
- Are there places in your community where you could provide help?

This discussion addresses those issues that your students identified. If necessary, list the actions on a separate part of the board so that students can see them clearly.

3. SET RULES FOR DECISION MAKING.

Explain to students that they've just created a list of potential service learning projects. Explain that while each has merit, you'd like them to try to choose one on which they'd like to focus.

Explain that a final choice will be made either by majority rule (i.e., a vote will be held and the topic that receives the most votes will win) or by consensus (i.e., those in favor of a topic must convince those opposed to accept the topic). Using the same debate structure as in Module One: Communication Skills, you may choose to have students participate in a controlled debate to finalize a topic.

Another alternative is that a final choice will be made first by consensus and then by majority rule (i.e., after each group makes an argument for why their project topic should be chosen, a vote is held and the topic with the most votes will be acted upon).

4. IF THE DECISION IS BEING MADE BY MAJORITY RULE, STUDENTS VOTE ON TOPICS.

Number the potential topics as they are listed on the board. Ask each student to write on a piece of paper the number of the topic in which they are most interested. Collect the papers, count the votes, and announce which topic received the most votes.

If the number of votes between two topics is equal or especially close, consider holding a runoff vote. If the voting is still close, or if choosing becomes divisive, consider inviting students to work in smaller groups on separate projects.

5. IF THE DECISION IS BEING MADE BY CONSENSUS, STUDENTS DISCUSS AND VOTE ON TOPICS.

Number the potential topics as they are listed on the board. Call out each option and ask students to raise their hands to vote for the topic of their choice. Have students who voted similarly meet in small groups. Give each group five minutes to discuss arguments for why its choice is best. Give each group two or three minutes to present its arguments to the rest of the class. Then, hold another vote.

If you have decided to combine the consensus and majority rule methods, announce which topic received the most votes. If you have decided to make a decision solely by consensus, repeat this process until students agree upon a project.