

Windows to Our Community

Overview

In this activity, participants will explore their community, creating a piece of art representing their community as it is, as well how it can be improved. Ideally the activity will culminate in participant identification of a community service project or volunteer opportunity.

Grades

Any

Activity Type

Individual or Partner

Large Group

Materials

- Handout, “Windows to Our Community” or larger chart paper/poster board
- Art supplies (construction paper, glue, scissors, crayons/markers)

Duration

1+ hour

Instructions

Part I: Exploring Our Community

1. Lead group members in a verbal brainstorm of the word “community”. Encourage them to explore all aspects of the word that comes to mind. As a group, create a definition, such as “a social group whose members live in an area, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.” Also discuss:
 - What makes up our community? What might people see, hear, smell, do, etc. in our community?
 - What do you most like about your community?
 - What types of things need to be improved in our community?
 - Why should we care about our community? Why should we care about things even if they don’t affect us directly (i.e. if our community has people who are homeless, yet we are not homeless, why should we care)?
2. Explain to the group that they will be exploring their view of their own community in an art activity. It is the facilitator’s choice whether this will be done individually or in partners.
3. First, give each participant a copy of the handout “Windows to Our Community”. Instruct each participant to illustrate and note the positive things about their community on the handout. Make sure participants understand that there is no right or wrong. Students can use a mixture of words and art, and can create drawings that are literal or symbolic. Students may illustrate objects,

places, people, actions, emotions, etc., but all should represent positive aspects of the participant's community. (Instruct students that they can draw/color across the two lines located on the handout.) You also may want to provide larger sheets of construction paper, poster board, or chart paper for students to use instead of the handout.

4. As participants finish, instruct them to make two cuts on their drawings on the two lines shown (cut from the bottom up, stopping where the line ends so that the flap will remain attached). This creates a square that can flip up. (If you have substituted larger paper for the handout, just have students cut that paper in the same way the handout shows.) Then, have them glue this along the edges (both sides and the top only) to a sheet of construction paper or additional piece of paper that is the same size as their art. Make sure participants only glue the edges, and that they do not glue the flip-up square.
5. Once finished, instruct participants to again illustrate their community, but this time focusing on things that they feel need improvement. Participants will illustrate these problematic objects, places, people, actions, emotions, etc. on the bottom glued page by lifting up the flap and drawing underneath it.
6. Once all participants are finished, allow them to share their "Window to Our Community", first showing and discussing the positive aspects they noted, then moving on to the negative. As participants share, note their comments in a place all can see. When everyone has shared, discuss:
 - What similarities were there in the positive things we noted about our communities?
 - What similarities were there in the things that need improvement?
 - If you were able to choose one community problem, which would you most want to improve and why? (allow students to choose several main issues)

Part II: Implementing a Community Action Plan

7. Based on student response, label several sheets of large paper with one issue highlighted on each. Tape them in various areas of the room. Instruct students to consider which of those issues they most care about. Give them a moment to think, since they must choose one. Tell them that it is important they choose an issue important to them, because they are going to be working in groups to brainstorm ways to address this issue. Then, tell students to go to the area of the room where that issue is labeled, and to circle up with the other students who arrive there. (If a particular area has too many students, split the group into smaller working groups.)
8. Next, hand out the attached Community Action Plan and instruct students that they will be working together to devise a realistic plan for the class to implement in terms of helping the issue they have identified as most pressing to them. Go over the steps as defined on the attached handout and allow students to discuss their ideas. As they work, circulate and encourage them to be as specific as possible. Based on your time frame, you may need to come back to this planning stage several times before implementing.
 - *Note that the Community Action Plan may be more effective as a class activity, lead by the teacher, when dealing with students in K-5 grades.*

9. Once groups have started and/or finished a first draft of their Community Action Plan Facilitate a discussion that brings to light governmental responsibilities and citizen responsibilities in fixing community problems. Ask:
- Who in our community is generally responsible for fixing problems such as the ones we have mentioned? (facilitate the discussion to focus on the balance between government involvement –lawmakers, police, committees, etc.- versus individuals.)
 - How do we ensure that our lawmakers and government officials are doing their job and improving our community? In what ways can we communicate our communities’ needs to lawmakers? (facilitate discussion around civic involvement, voting, reading the paper/watching the news to stay informed, attending open governmental sessions, participating by letting your opinion be known via meetings, letters to the editor, letters to legislators, etc.)
10. Once students have developed their Community Action Plans, focus on putting one into action!

Follow Up Activities

- Implement a service learning project, fund raiser, volunteer day, letter writing campaign, etc. based on the ideas posed by the group.
- Arrange for your group to attend a government hearing or meeting, arrange a visit from a resource person (representative from local or state government) or arrange a day of lobbying.
- Host a community evening displaying participant’s art work and ideas on “Windows to My Community”. Participants can give speeches about their communities and needed improvements, present skits based on community issues discussed, etc. Invite parents, community members, and government/community officials to attend. Use this event to advocate for a community wide volunteer day.

Community Action Plan

Identified Issue:

Group Members:

Describe the issue in detail and the negative impact it is having on your community:

Ideally, what would you like to see happen in terms of improving this issue? Brainstorm desired outcomes/visualize the end result:

Is there anything already being done to help improve this issue? If so, describe (i.e. organizations already addressing it, programs that exist, etc.) and rate their effectiveness thus far:

Are there any of these organizations who we can work with to help solve this issue? (Identify any programs already established that we could volunteer for or who might be able to help us reach our goal):

What ideas does your group have to help make this issue better in your community? First, imagine that you can do anything that comes to your mind...brainstorm and list everything that you can think of:

Now, considering who we are and possible resources, list ideas of things we can do to improve this issue:

List the steps it will take to accomplish this:

What obstacles might you run into? How can you be prepared to circumvent these?

What do we need to do today to GET STARTED?



Windows to Our Community

