

Activity - Community Citizenship

Overview

Students will identify the variety of ways to maintain an active relationship to their citizenship, and collectively identify and pursue one positive plan of action to enhance the quality and effectiveness of their citizenship.

Objectives

- ▶ Students will appreciate the various facets of the term ‘citizenship’ in relation to their own lives and as members of a community.
- ▶ Students will develop a stronger respect for classmates, peers, family and community, as well as their own potential as citizens, through a practical community improvement exercise.

Background

It’s easy to say ‘I’ve cast my ballot, my job is finished’, but if students still believe this, it is time to get them to start thinking otherwise. While students may take great pride in voting this election, their job as citizens is not nearly finished. As outlined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, while all Canadians are entitled to integral rights based on Canadian laws, traditions and values, with those rights come inherent **responsibilities**. Those responsibilities involve voting in elections, but also equally important responsibilities, such as **eliminating discrimination and injustice, helping others in the community and to protect our heritage and environment**.

Thus, it’s commonly understood that an **active citizen**, while appreciating the legal rights they are afforded in a free society, are also aware of the moral responsibilities that balance those rights, and exercise both equally.

Preparation and Materials

- ▶ Develop a strong analogy to begin this activity, or use the one provided below in Step 1.
- ▶ Brainstorm a good list of indicators of active citizenship, such as volunteering, participating at the community level, joining clubs and associations for the betterment of the community, contributing time or money to community groups, becoming involved in debate at any level, working towards solutions to include all minorities equally, maintaining a balance of information gathering (media literacy), reaching out to those less fortunate and interacting politically.
- ▶ Investigate the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* web site, <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/>.
- ▶ Photocopy the ‘Community Citizenship’ worksheet for students, and develop a worksheet for students to use for future planning for their project of choice.

Timeframes

This activity should take at least **120-240 minutes (2-4 hours)** or more if you choose to follow the entire activity through. Adjustments can be made to accommodate a shorter time frame.

Activity

1. Put your students in roughly equal groups (if they are able to choose their own, this is better), and begin the activity by writing a headline on the board: “Local Community Centre to Close Due to Lack of Funds”.
2. Ask students in their groups if they should care about this. Get feedback.
3. Slowly, begin to add these points on the board:
 - You live up the street from the community centre.
 - Your Grandmother has played bingo there for 10 years.
 - You grew up playing soccer in the field behind it, and spent every summer there in day camp as a child.
 - There are talks to build a large supermarket from the big chain in its place, which could put your father’s small mini-mart out of business. This is bad for your dad, and for you - he could no longer pay for your education if that happened.
4. Ask students if their opinion is changing, and if they now care. If so, why now? (Students may indicate they do care because of the strong personal connection to the centre).

5. In groups, ask students to brainstorm possible courses of action. Would students act in a situation like this? Circulate, taking notes on the board as you hear particularly interesting ideas, such as writing a letter to the local MLA, starting a petition, protesting, writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper. Ask students what steps would be involved in each case, as well as what the possible outcomes could be.
6. Take up possibilities as a class. Ask students if they've ever done any of these things before.
7. Explain that these are all indicators of active citizenship. Ask students as a class to brainstorm other aspects of effective citizenship they can think of, adding your own as well. Ask the class to help you group them into larger themes. Ask students why these are important.
8. Explain that we are at an interesting period in Western history, in which many of the rights and freedoms we enjoy are simply taken for granted. Canadians and other citizens around the world have fought for freedoms for hundreds of years, including the right to vote, for the abolition of slavery, the end of Apartheid and freedom of speech. While this is the case, there are still endless ways to improve our community, province and country, and the relative freedoms we enjoy.
9. With the time remaining, ask students to brainstorm some of the things we as citizens have the power to improve. If students are brainstorming words like 'environment', ask them to be more local and more specific, until each group has narrowed down a slim list of possible local goals. Hand out the worksheet called 'Community Citizenship', and ask students to fill in the sheet with at least three ideas.
10. Ask them to finish this assignment for homework, pointing them in the direction of the *Canadian Rights and Freedoms* web site if they need assistance.
11. The following class, check for completion, then put students back in groups. Together, they will choose one of the ideas they have outlined, and put together a plan of action to make it happen...or try! Students will meet at pre-determined times each week, determine their roles and report progress. Depending on progress, groups may choose to abandon unsuccessful projects and align with more encouraging ones.

TEACHER NOTE: If students are encountering a great deal of difficulty brainstorming concepts or action plans, provide some that students can explore. Some examples could be:

- Writing a concept paper to legislature (the very first step to developing new laws or legislation).
- Petitioning for a cause they believe in.
- Planning fundraisers to help a particularly struggling community business.
- Writing to newly elected MLA's to ask for help raising money for a badly needed homeless shelter or community program, and drawing attention to the cause.

Critical Reflection Questions

- ▶ Do you feel that you have been adequately prepared to participate in elections in the future? Why/why not?
- ▶ Do you feel that the election process is the fairest way to elect a government? Why/why not?
- ▶ Do you feel that it is important to contribute to your community? Is that an important part of democracy in your opinion?
- ▶ Do you feel 'connected' to your community? To the world?

Evaluation and Assessment

Students can be evaluated on class participation and participation in groups, as well as the 'Community Citizenship' exercise and subsequent teamwork.

Extension Activities

In class/school-wide:

- ▶ Invite students to consider a wide range of measures to bring attention to their cause, including involving the school, prominent community members and media.
- ▶ Ask students to write a report on the project and its outcomes, citing what strategies were successful/unsuccessful, and what they would have done differently if they could do it again.
- ▶ If two or more groups are making headway on their projects, initiate an in-class competition or promote the project school-wide.

Home and Community Connections

- ▶ Encourage other forms of active citizenship. If certain students were particularly interested in this unit, recommend that they join a political party, volunteer at a party office, or consider a career in politics. Visit www.elections.bc.ca Resource Centre under 'Guide for Candidates' for more information.

WORKSHEET

Community Citizenship

| | Idea #1 | Idea #2 | Idea #3 | Idea #4 |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Community Issue | | | | |
| Causes | | | | . |
| Possible Solutions | | | | |
| Community Benefits | | | | |