

Kids Can Make a Difference

Summary

Students recognize that both individuals and communities must identify and solve problems. Students discuss ways in which they can participate in service learning and community problem solving.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Materials

- *Kids Guide to Social Action*

by Barbara Lewis (optional, to be furnished by the school or teacher)

Handouts: "[Sassy Students Fight Obesity](#)" (pdf) and "[Fourth Grade Students from Syracuse, Utah, Change the State Song](#)" (pdf)

Butcher paper for brainstorming

Handout: "[Problem Solving/Decision Making Grid](#)" (pdf)

Background for Teachers

Enduring Understanding

Good citizens seek ways to help and improve their communities.

Essential Questions

In what ways is serving the community a component of good citizenship?

In what ways can young people help improve their community?

Objectives

Students will understand that problems may be solved by taking personal responsibility for community problems, issues, or needs. Through the study of two service learning projects initiated by Utah students, students will identify ways that they can serve their community.

Instructional Procedures

Setting the Stage: Personal Problem Solving

Tell a personal story of a problem that needs addressing in your life. Maybe there is a vacant lot in your neighborhood that is overgrown and unsightly, maybe you know an older neighbor who is lonely. Maybe you would like a garden in the yard, but don't know where to place it.

Ask students if they have problems that continue to be frustrating. Share some of their ideas.

Explain that the class will discuss ways to find and solve problems.

Activity: Envisioning Exercise

Ask students to close their eyes and relax. They may rest their heads on the desks. Speak slowly as they visualize while you talk.

Explain: "Today we will take an imaginary walk around the community. Remember getting up this morning. In your mind, look around your room. Do you notice any problems that need fixing in your room? In your imagination, walk out of the room and into the kitchen for breakfast. Do you notice any problem areas in your house? Now let's walk outside. We are going to head towards school. Imagine looking to the right and to the left. Do you notice any problems, issues, or needs along the street, sidewalk, or yards? Are there any broken sidewalks, dangerous intersections, or trashy areas? Now let's imagine that we are entering the school grounds. Look around the school at the road, the grounds, and the outside of the building. Imagine walking around the building. Do you notice any issues, problems, or needs around the school? Now pretend that you are walking into the school and towards your classroom. What do you notice that could use some problem

solving?"

Instruct students to open their eyes and remember the problems that they imagined.

Activity: Brainstorming Community Problems

Divide students into small groups.

Pass out large sheets of butcher paper to each group.

Instruct students to write the words "Issues, Problems, and Needs in Our Community" in a circle or bubble in the center of the paper.

Ask students to web all of the problems, issues, and needs that they visualized. Include problems in the neighborhood and in and around the school. (Give students time to process their ideas.)

Ask each group to put a star by the three problems they think are the most important. Have each group present their findings.

Activity: Students Make a Difference

Ask students: "Why do you think no one has fixed these problems?" (Sometimes people feel helpless, think the solution will be too costly, or think someone else should be responsible for a problem.)

Explain that municipal governments address community problems every day, but sometimes regular citizens are the ones who find ways to make their community better.

Pass out two stories: (1) "[Sassy Students Fight Obesity](#)" (pdf) and (2) "[Fourth Grade Students from Syracuse, Utah, Change the State Song](#)" (pdf)

Read the stories as a class.

Discuss each story. List the problems and solutions identified by the students. Ask what both stories have in common. (Groups of students identified a problem and then went about finding solutions to the problem.) How did each class select a problem to solve, and were the problems important to the community? (Morningside students were looking for a problem for their Community Problem Solving unit; the Cook students came up against a problem and decided to take it on as a project.)

Look at the "Sassy" project. What are the steps taken by students as they work through their problem?

List the steps on chart paper or on the board.

- Identify all problems or challenges associated with an issue.

- Select the main problem.

- Brainstorm possible solutions.

- Decide on the best solution.

- Write a plan of action.

- Implement the plan.

Explain that this is a problem solving model used by the Utah Future Problem Solving program as well as most other problem solvers. The model works well in dealing with most challenges!

Ask: "In what ways did both groups of students involve government officials? How did this help the success of the project?"

Activity: Selecting Your Own Project

Problem solving can be lots of fun. Ask students to review the problems listed in the Envisioning Exercise.

Instruct students in the use of a decision-making grid. This can be done with the entire class or in groups.

Students select four possible problems. These will be "alternatives." Select criteria questions that are appropriate to the issues being discussed.

Record alternatives down the left side of the grid and write criteria questions above the grid.

Give each alternative a score from one to four (four being the highest and one being the lowest).

Move down each column in the grid and use each number only once. Students will be comparing

each alternative problem to the same criterion before moving to the next criteria column.

After each alternative has been ranked, students add up the points horizontally to get a total for each solution.

The winning solution will be the alternative with the highest score.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: *The "winning" solution might not be the best. Select a solution that will actually work for you and the class.*

Possible Criteria Questions

Which solution is the most practical for our class to work on? (Some problems are important but would be difficult for students to impact.)

Which solution would be the most interesting to work on?

Which solution is most likely to work?

Which solution will most benefit the community or school?

Which solution will help the most people?

Which solution does the class like the most?

Which solution will take the least amount of time?

Which solution can we most afford?

Which solution will get the most people excited and involved?

Discuss which solution won in each group. Write a plan to implement your solution and get started?

Extensions

After selecting a problem, you may wish to contact government or business representatives who could help students with their project. Service-learning provides valuable learning during the problem-solving process. Experts are usually willing to come to school and offer helpful information.

Consider how students will present their findings. Which audience would enjoy hearing about the students' work? Which would benefit from the problem solving?

Contact Utah Future Problem Solving competition and enter the class project in the Community Problem Solving competition held each year.

Bibliography

This lesson plan is part of the Utah League of Cities and Towns [This Must be Utah! A Teacher's Guide to Utah Cities and Towns](#)

Author: Sheri Sohm

Editor: Sydney Fannesbeck , Director of Training

Utah League of Cities and Towns

Authors

[Utah LessonPlans](#)