



Democracy and Community

Objectives

- Students will reflect on ways they can listen with empathy.
- Students will deliberate using evidence and consensus building.
- Students will define community and create connections to democratic skills.
- Students will consider how they speak and listen to one another.

Overview

In this activity, students will analyze the connections between living in a Democracy and a community. The goal of this activity will support students in moving beyond the early elementary school ideas of communities and community helpers; to peel back the layers of complexity about how communities are often hard to define and are not composed of people who always agree. Therefore, it is important to better understand how diversity within communities is important to fostering civic virtues like perspective taking, listening and speaking skills, empathy, and acceptance.

Compelling Question

How can understanding others create a stronger community?

Materials

- Handout: *Defining Community*
- Handout: *Community Definition and Etymology*
- Handout: *Active Listening Strategies*
- Handout: *Creating Classroom Community*
- Handout: *Active Listening and Community Building Reflection*
- Handout: *Community and Democracy Reflection*

Teacher Preparation

- One of the goals of this activity is to highlight student agency and voice. While there are structured protocols for students to collaborate, share, and reflect, keep in mind additional strategies or routines that empower all students to have entry points into the content and opportunities to participate and be heard. These

include encouraging students to participate in their home language, and providing vocabulary and reading support based on the needs of your students.

- A significant theme of this activity is student understanding of the importance of diverse perspectives to creating and strengthening communities. Students are provided with a variety of opportunities to both share and actively listen to and learn from the perspective and experience of others.
 - Since student use of active listening strategies are critical for success with this activity, an active listening strategies handout has been provided. Teachers are also encouraged to keep in mind additional strategies or routines that encourage active listening and create a positive learning environment for students to share their thoughts.

Procedure

1. Begin class by telling students they will be analyzing the connections between democracy and community, and that they will begin by first identifying and reflecting on important values within their own communities.
2. To get started, provide each student with their own copy of the *Defining Community* handout, which contains a word bank of eleven potential values to help students get started, but encourage students to also include their own values of importance if that value is not already listed in the word bank.
3. As the warm up for this activity, students will begin working on the *Defining Community* handout. Students will independently identify five community values that they feel are the most important community values in their lives, and provide a brief written reflection on why those five values are of importance in their lives.
4. As students complete their individual reflection on their five values, ask them to gather in partners and compare their selected values. As students compare their five values, encourage them to make note of similarities and differences in the values they identified as important in their own lives, and encourage the students to discuss why they may have selected different values.
5. As students complete this partner discussion, ask them to record a brief reflection on the importance of the differences between their selected values through the reflection prompts provided on the *Defining Community* handout.
6. After students have identified their community values and discussed differences between their values and the values of their partner, transition into a whole class discussion to analyze the etymology and definition of “community.”
 - a. First, ask students to brainstorm their own definition of the word community, and select a few students to share their definition of community with the class.

- b. As students share their definitions, call attention to key similarities and differences between their responses. For example, some students may frame community through a geographic lens, while others may frame community through a shared interest lens, etc.
 - c. Then, show students the Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary definition of community, as well as the New World Encyclopedia's summary of the etymology of the word community which are provided through the *Community Definition and Etymology* handout.
 - d. As students analyze the definition and etymology of community, ask probing questions to extend student thinking such as:
 - i. What are similarities between your definition and the Merriam-Webster definition?
 - ii. What are differences between your definition and the Merriam-Webster definition?
 - iii. How can learning the history of the term community help you better understand and define community?
7. After the class has created a shared definition of community, they will then participate in a small group activity to identify five values that shape the core of the class community. Prepare students for the activity by sharing with them that they will discuss various community values of importance with their peers, and that they will practice active listening strategies while participating in their small group discussions.
 8. Pass out the *Active Listening Strategies* and *Creating Classroom Community* handouts, and ask students to pull out their completed *Defining Community* handout. Provide students with time to review these handouts and encourage them to ask questions about any items that may create confusion.
 9. To begin, ask students to return to the partner they originally completed the *Defining Community* handout with as part of the warm up activity.
 - a. Students will work with this partner to select five shared values that are important to both partners.
 - i. Encourage students to use active listening strategies while selecting these shared values, and remind students that they may need to compromise with their partner on certain values as not every student will have individually selected the same five values.
 - ii. Once they have selected their five values, each student will write those five values on their *Creating Classroom Community* handout.
 - b. After each partner group has selected their five shared values, combine partner groups to create small groups of four throughout the classroom. Now, students will work with this small group of four to select five shared values that are important to all members in that small group.

- i. Encourage students to again use active listening strategies while selecting these small group shared values, and remind small groups that they may need to compromise with other members in their group as not every partner group will have selected the same five values.
 - ii. Once the small group has selected their five values, each student will write those five values on their *Creating Classroom Community* handout.
 - c. After each small group has identified their five shared community values, complete a whole-class discussion to identify the five shared community values of the class as a whole.
 - i. Encourage each small group to share their five values and write each value on the board until all groups have shared their values.
 - d. From the list of these shared small group values, lead a whole class discussion to select the five shared values of the whole class.
 - i. Encourage students to continue utilizing active listening strategies through the whole class discussion.
 - ii. Each student will write the five whole class values on their *Creating Classroom Community* handout once selected.
10. Once the class has identified its five shared community values, provide students with time to complete the *Active Listening and Community Building Reflection* handout. The reflection prompts provided will create the opportunity for students to reflect on the importance of active listening to interacting within a community.
11. As students complete their independent active listening reflection, reconvene the class for a final whole-class discussion to analyze connections to community and democracy.
 - a. Teacher Note: The overarching goal of this whole-class discussion is to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on the importance of personal values and perspectives that build strong communities and are representative of core American values such as freedom, equality, and democracy.
12. Depending on the size and grade level of the class, you can choose to facilitate this discussion in multiple ways.
 - a. Option 1: Each student completes an individual written reflection to the *Community and Democracy Reflection* handout, and you facilitate a whole-class debrief discussion to identify key takeaways related to each prompt. If selecting this option, provide each student with their own copy of the *Community and Democracy Reflection* handout.

- b. Option 2: Lead a whole-class discussion using the *Community and Democracy Reflection* handout as a guide. You may pose questions, provide students with the opportunity to participate in writing, verbally, through turn-and-talk activities, or other strategies to encourage student participation and engagement based on the needs of your students.
13. Conclude the activity by asking students to consider the following question: “how can understanding others create a stronger community, and why is a strong community important to American values like freedom, equality, and democracy?”

Frameworks and Standards

Educating for American Democracy

- How has our geographic, social, economic, and political landscape changed over time?
 - What different perspectives are there on those changes (see History Thematic Question), and on the benefits and costs of those changes?
 - What principles and values do Americans invoke in our debates about these issues?
- What gives societies their identities?

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

D2.Civ.10.6–8: Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

D4.7.6–8: Assess their individual and collective capabilities to take action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

D2.Civ.10.9–12: Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interest and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D4.7.9–12: Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy, identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Common Core English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Directions: The word bank below contains important community values. Using the word bank, select five community values that are of the most importance in your life, and reflect on your selection of those values in the space provided below.

<p>Comfort To have a pleasant and comfortable life</p>	<p>Freedom To have the ability to make my own decisions</p>	<p>Equality To promote just and equal treatment for all</p>	<p>Safety To be safe and secure</p>
<p>Cooperation To work collaboratively with others</p>	<p>Courtesy To be considerate and polite to others</p>	<p>Spirituality To grow and mature spiritually</p>	<p>Responsibility To make and carry out responsible decisions</p>
<p>Health To be physically well and healthy</p>	<p>Order To have a life that is well-ordered and organized</p>	<p>Tolerance To accept and respect those who differ from me</p>	<p>Other Value Select your own value not included in this list</p>

Select Your Values: Imagine that you are moving to a new place where you do not know anyone, and you will need to find a new community. Which five values above would be MOST important to you within that new community to ensure it feels like home?

Value #	Value Name	Why is this value important to you in your new community?
<i>Example</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>I want to live in a place where others respect me, even if I am different from them in some way.</i>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Compare Values: With one partner, compare the similarities and differences in your selected community values. Reflect on the importance of those similarities and differences in the space below.

<p>Reflection Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What values did my partner select that were the same as my values? • Were there any differences in my partner's explanation for why they selected this value? • What values did my partner select that were different from my values? Why did they choose these values? • After listening to my partner share their five values, what changes would I like to make to my own?

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary Definition of Community:

A unified body of individuals: such as

- a. the people with common interests living in a particular area
- b. a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society
- c. a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society
- d. a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests
- e. a group linked by a common policy
- f. an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (such as species) in a common location
- g. state, commonwealth.

New World Encyclopedia's Etymology of Community:

The word community is derived from the Latin *communitas* (meaning the same), which is in turn derived from *communis*, which means "common, public, shared by all or many." *Communis* comes from a combination of the Latin prefix con- (which means "together") and the word munis (which has to do with performing services).

Active listening is an important 21st-century skill that builds empathy, understanding, establishes trust, and instills confidence that a listener cares about the speaker and their message. Here is a list of active listening strategies for students.

- Affirming body language and nonverbal signs
 - Face the person who is speaking, make eye contact with the speaker, nod your head, lean forward, and refrain from speaking.
- Ask questions
 - Try to ask open ended questions that encourage the speaker to share more than just a yes/no response to learn more about their thinking.
- Summarize the speaker's statements back to them to confirm understanding
 - Restate some of the important themes of the speaker's message to them, using your own words.
- Embrace silence
 - Provide plenty of space for the speaker to share their thoughts without fear of interruption.
- Acknowledge the speaker's point before sharing your thoughts
 - Before sharing your ideas, acknowledge a previous point from the speaker first. The following sentence starters can help:
 - "I understand how..."
 - "When you said..."
 - "I agree with..."
- Hear Three, then Me
 - "Ask 3 then Me" is a strategy many teachers use when students must ask three peers a question before asking for help from the teacher. In a small group discussion, you must wait until at least three people have shared before you make your contribution.
- Consider the perspectives and experiences of others
 - All individuals have unique knowledge and experiences, so it is important to seek out others with different perspectives than your own and actively listen to their thoughts.
- Keep an open mind, resist taking sides, and promote empathy
 - Listen to and research viewpoints that are different from your own, gather evidence to support those viewpoints, and consider why those might oppose your personal beliefs.

The purpose of this activity is to work with your peers to develop a shared list of five core community values that will shape the community of your class. Use the spaces below to complete this activity.

Part 1: Partner Activity

Column 1: My Values <i>Record your five values in the spaces below.</i>	Column 2: My Partner's Values <i>Record your partner's five values in the spaces below.</i>	Column 3: Our Shared Values <i>With your partner, select five shared values and record those below.</i>

Part 2: Small Group Activity

In this section, you will be paired with another partner group. Each partner group should share their shared values from Part 1, and create a new set of shared values as a small group.

My Partner Shared Values <i>Record your partner values (from Column 3 above) in the spaces below.</i>	Partner Team #2's Shared Values <i>Record the values from the other partner team (from their Column 3) in the spaces below.</i>	Our Shared Small Group Values <i>As a small group, decide on the five most important values and record those below.</i>

Part 3: Whole Class Activity

In this section, you will participate in a whole class discussion to create a classroom set of five values to determine the core community values of the whole class. You'll share your Shared Small Group Values from Part 2, and once the class has determined the five shared values of the class, record those in the spaces below.

Guiding Questions for Reflection

1. How are the five community values of the whole class different from my individual community values from the Warm Up activity? Why might this be important?
2. When working with my partner, what did I learn about their values or their process for selecting values? How was their process of selecting values similar to and different from my process?
3. How well did I actively listen while participating in the Creating Classroom Community Activity? What specific active listening strategies did I use to listen to my partner, small group team members, and other peers?
4. How did my individual community values change over time while interacting with others throughout the activity? How did my values change while interacting with a partner? How did my values change while interacting in a small group? How did my values change while interacting with the whole class?
5. Why is the ability to build consensus with others an important civic skill?

Directions: Reflect on the importance of community within American democracy using the prompts below.

1. Why is consensus building an important civic skill?
2. Why is it important to actively seek input from others when developing a community?
3. How can understanding others create a stronger community?
4. What opportunities do you have to listen to and learn from other people, and how can learning from others help strengthen your community?
5. How can individual differences strengthen a community?
6. Why is the ability to build and maintain strong communities important to American democracy?
7. How can citizens of the United States engage through the democratic process to share individual values and learn from the values of others to build a stronger nation?