



Protecting Democracy

Objectives

- Identify one way in which you can improve your community through civic action/engagement.
- Create a plan to enact this change.

Overview

This lesson will have students identify one way in which they can take positive action in their own communities. Using the question, “What will you do?” as a starting point, students will discuss what civic participation means and then take part in a visible thinking strategy that unpacks what responsibilities and obligations individuals have due to living in a democratic society.

Students will then discuss why civic engagement is needed to protect democracy, and why democracy is a local, county, state, national, and even global issue. Either on their own or with a partner, students will brainstorm ways the responsibility or obligation they identified can be implemented or improved in their own community. From here, each student or group will outline steps they can take to change their community by completing the *Planning Action* handout.

Compelling Question

What will you do?

Materials

- Access to the internet and other research resources
- Pen/Pencils
- Picture: Informed Action
- Handout: *Planning Action*
- Handout: *Peer Reflection Protocol*

Teacher Preparation

- Some ideas students might discuss during the brainstorming session have been included in a separate handout if needed.
- Teachers can provide examples of improvements that can be made to give students inspiration, but the goal is to have students come up with their own ideas, rather than use those of others.
- For extension opportunities, the class can share their ideas with each other and allow time for feedback.

Procedure

1. To begin, have students take part in the *I Notice, I Think* warm-up using the following quote from President Ronald Reagan:

“Freedom is a fragile thing and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. And those in world history who have known freedom and then lost it have never known it again.”
2. After students have read the quote again, use the following question to dig deeper into analyzing it.
 - a. What do you notice or what stands out to you?
 - b. What do you think President Reagan meant by this excerpt? What concerns might he have been raising?
 - c. Do you see examples today of people fighting for their freedom?
3. Follow up this discussion by asking the class, “What do you think informed action is?” After several responses, ask the class how informed action might relate to President Reagan’s quote about the fragility of democracy.
4. Next, share with the class what informed action is by using the definition below.

“A means of civic engagement in which individuals or groups of people take some kind of action to address a social or political question, following a process of questioning, analyzing, and reflecting.”
5. Explain that they will discuss the definition by analyzing an image from the past to better connect the definition to informed action. Share with students that the image relates, in some way, to informed action and making efforts to ensure the ideals of democracy were protected.
6. Instruct students that rather than explaining what the image is, students will write two to four questions that they have about each image. The goal of this exercise is to focus on the image as well as develop their skills for questioning and creative thinking. Give the class a few minutes, or more if needed, to write down questions about the image.

7. Next, share their questions with the class and then have the class choose the question they would most like to answer. Students can vote on the one question they are most curious about or the teacher can choose the question. As students finish, share with the class the brief background to the image and discuss how this information shapes the meaning behind it.
8. Another purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate how individuals in the past and the present have shown empathy and great resolve by taking informed action. To help connect these ideas to students' own lives, share that they will be brainstorming and planning ways that they can take some type of informed action. It will be important to remind students that no action is too small, and that showing empathy and advocating for others is an important part of upholding Democracy.
9. To get started, students will identify one issue in their community they would like to address and brainstorm possible actions they could take. They can work on their own or, if possible, small groups. Have the students:
 - a. choose which community they'd like to focus on (their school, their neighborhood, an extracurricular group they're involved with, religious organizations, etc.).
 - b. identify one issue in that community they'd like to address. To do this, they should consider the "why" and the "how" behind the action.
10. Some students may need extra support for brainstorming issues or actions. It might be helpful to allow students to discuss in larger groups the issues they notice around them and small actions that might be accessible to them.
11. Once students have identified their community and the issue they'd like to address, they will then follow the remaining steps. Remind them that "informed" action requires a thoughtful approach to addressing potential root causes of an issue and considers ways to resolve the issue by using research. Post the following questions/prompts on the board or pass out the *Planning Action* handout.
 - a. Where else in the world has this issue existed?
 - b. What, if any, solutions were used to fix this issue in areas of the world where it occurred?
 - c. If solutions were found, how could they be applied to help your chosen community? If solutions were not found, what ideas do you have of ways to address this problem?
 - d. Who could you go to for support in helping correct the problem?
 - e. What perspectives do you need to consider before planning and collaborating?
 - f. What results would you hope to see from your solution?
12. If time permits, consider using the *Peer Reflection Protocol* handout to allow students the chance to practice giving and receiving feedback on their plans. This process, outlined on the handout, can help reinforce positive social skills like active listening and providing feedback.

Frameworks and Standards

Educating for American Democracy

- How has our geographic, political, social, and economic landscape changed over time?
 - What principles and values do Americans invoke in our debates about these issues?
- Who are “We the people of the United States” and how has the nation’s population changed over time?
 - Why does constitutional democracy depend on the idea of “the people”?

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.14.6-8: Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

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.

D2.Civ.14.9-12: Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting 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.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

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.

Informed Action

Image 1: March on Washington (1963)



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
Washington, D.C. 20540 USA
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/>

Which “community” do you want to make a difference in? *This could include, but is not limited to, your school, extracurricular organizations, local government, and your neighborhood.*

Guided Questions

Where else in the world has this issue existed?

What, if any, solutions were used to address this issue in areas of the world where it occurred?

If solutions were found, how could they be applied to help your chosen community? If solutions were not found, what ideas do you have of ways to address this problem?

Who are “allies” you could go to for support in helping address the problem?

What perspectives should you consider before acting?

What results would you hope to see from your solution?

When could you begin to implement your solution?

How long might it take before you see results?

Write a proposal/elevator pitch about your solution.

Consider, if you had to “sell” this idea to someone, what would you need to say? Be persuasive.

Directions: After selecting a partner, use the structure below to give and receive peer feedback. Make sure to be an active listener. If this means that you need to insert short 30 second breaks between each section to jot notes, then take that extra time.

Time	Phase	Description	Directions for Partner A	Directions for Partner B
0–2	Elevator Pitch	Partner A shares their action plan with Partner B.	Share your prepared action plan.	Take notes on what you are hearing or listen actively.
2–4	Clarifying Questions	Partner B asks clarifying questions without giving feedback.	Answer clarifying questions.	Ask clarifying questions.
4–6	Feedback	Partner B gives feedback to Partner A.	Take notes on specific feedback you have received.	Utilize the TAG format to offer feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell something you liked • Ask additional questions • Give your partner feedback
7–9	Next Steps	Partner A considers a list of future revisions.	Make a list of future revisions.	Check the list of revisions. Does this capture your suggestions?
Now repeat the process with Partner B presenting their work.				