



LESSON 3

Exploring International Connections Through Service Learning

LESSON DESCRIPTION

The goal of service learning is to enhance student learning by providing opportunities to put the skills and knowledge emphasized in the classroom into action in the community. Service-learning experiences should be tailored to match the unique resources and needs of your school and community. Service-learning projects grow out of students' needs, interests, and concerns. They provide away for students to exercise skills in leadership, cooperation, and responsibility. An effective program encourages students to act locally but think globally. Such projects develop from students themselves when a school or classroom makes the study of international connections an important part of the curriculum. This lesson provides ideas for service learning projects that explore the community's cultural relationships with other parts of the world. The lesson, which could be carried out over several class periods, is intended to be flexible and might be used for any subject or topic or for any grade level.

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify problems, issues, or changes that are important to them;
- Focus on one course of action in response to an issue that is significant to them and to those being served;
- Identify specific learning and service outcomes and design their project to meet these outcomes;
- Work together cooperatively and take individual and group responsibility for their actions;
- Reflect upon what they are learning and use the result of ongoing evaluation to improve their project;
- Apply academic skills (such as letter writing, research, discussion, and presentation of information) to their service project.

KEY IDEAS

Service Learning. Applying skills and knowledge learned in school to community needs.

Common Good. The good of the community as a whole.

TIME REQUIRED

Time required depends on the type of service project chosen.

MATERIALS

- Chalkboard or overhead, flip charts and paper, construction paper, pens, and other materials for group work;
- Internet, newspapers, reference materials, etc.

PROCEDURES

1. Identify an issue or problem to work on in a service project. Open the discussion by asking students what changes or improvements they would like to see or what issues concern them within the school, community, nation, or world. (This activity might be related to the study of local, U.S., or world history; a geography or science project studying the local or world environment; or another topic. The discussion could also be used as the introduction to such a study.) List the topics on the chalkboard and discuss the issues of concern and the desired changes. After the discussion, have students vote on the topic they would like to explore further.
2. Research the topic or collect preliminary data. To learn more about the issue they have chosen, have students work in small groups to research the topic. Information may be gathered from newspaper archives; the school or local library; reference materials; the Internet; and interviews with parents, community members, local experts, leaders, or peers. Students may decide that some sort of assessment of community needs is appropriate.
3. Consider possible approaches or actions. Each of the small groups should report its findings to the class. After information has been shared, have students brainstorm solutions or approaches to the issue they have studied. (In brainstorming sessions and following activities, it is important to establish a class rule that no put-downs of anyone's ideas are permitted.)
4. Select a focus for a service learning project. From the ideas that have been generated through the previous activities have students decide upon a course of action that they want to pursue as a servicelearning project. In making their decisions, students should consider what services are most needed, what they can accomplish in the amount of time available, and how they can be most effective. (For examples of service-learning projects, see pages 23-24.)
5. Identify steps, objectives, and time line. Have students outline the steps that will be needed to carry out the project, the specific outcomes they expect to accomplish, and the time line in which they hope to complete their tasks. Expected learning, as well as service outcomes, should be identified.
6. Identify community partners. Work with students to identify which people and organizations should be informed about the project, which could provide helpful information, and which might want to contribute other types of useful support.
7. Carry out project. Students may need to divide up into teams to carry out different steps, phases, or tasks involved in the project. Specific responsibilities and roles of students as well as participating community members and organizations should be clearly defined and evaluated periodically. Set up ways by which students can document their work throughout the project.

8. Evaluation. Ongoing supervision and evaluation should be carried out at all stages of the program. Evaluation should be directly related to the identified objectives of the program and consider unexpected results, both positive and negative. The results of ongoing evaluation can help students to make adjustments as the project progresses.
9. Reflection. It has been said that people learn not simply by doing, but by reflecting about what they are doing. Students should be given frequent opportunities to think critically about their service-learning experience both during the project, and after the project is completed. Feedback should be provided from teachers, community members, and persons receiving services on an ongoing basis.

CLOSURE

In addition to reflecting on what they have learned, students should be recognized for their contributions to the common good. Recognition of accomplishments and celebration of efforts are important parts of any service-learning project. Students should be able to help plan their own celebration and receive recognition from people who are important to them and the community. Partner organizations, individuals, and people receiving services should share equally in the celebration and recognition.

ASSESSMENTS

Assessments of student outcomes can be made by evaluating products developed by students during the project. These may include business letters written to community organizations or local government officials and agencies; group research activities and presentations; logs of service activities; graphic and print materials, such as the development of logos, pamphlets, and posters; and presentations or performances for the class, school, or community. Students should also be evaluated on their skills in working together in cooperative groups, including listening to others, expressing opinions and ideas, working for consensus, remaining on task, sharing responsibility, and exercising leadership.

EXTENSIONS/CONNECTIONS

1. In order to carry out their project, students may need to apply their academic skills in new ways, such as writing a business letter, conducting an interview, or making a presentation. Provide students with models for business correspondence, interviews with community members, and presentations before an audience. Invite local business people, government officials, and community members to discuss effective business letters, interview strategies, and presentation styles. Have students rehearse and practice interviews and presentations before carrying them out. Debrief students after the interview or presentation is over.
2. Many service experiences motivate students to pursue more ambitious projects. Students may wish to research funding opportunities and engage in writing a grant to help fund a service-learning project. Students will need to understand and use some of the following terms: *in-kind support*, *opportunity*

cost, tax-exempt, decision-making, needs, wants, profit, community support, and role of government. See the Resources section for service-learning grant opportunities.

3. Students seeking a service-learning project might consider the Heifer Project International, PO. Box 767, Goshen, Indiana 46527-0767. This program helps provide families in developing countries with a farm animal, such as a cow or goat, that provides food or income on an ongoing basis ("a gift that keeps on giving").

RESOURCES

- The James E Ackerman Center for Democratic Citizenship provides a two-week summer institute for teachers that focuses on service-learning. The institute provides outstanding resources, ideas, materials, and a small start-up grant for service learning. You can contact the Center at: School of Education, Purdue University, 1442 Liberal Arts and Education Building, Room 4115, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1442.
- For information on grants and other service-learning resources, contact the Service Learning Consultant at the Indiana Department of Education, Room 229, State House, Indianapolis, IN, 462042798; tel. 317.233.3163; <http://www.doe.state.in.us>
- Learn and Serve America Grants, Center for School Improvement and Performance, Room 229 State House, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2798; tel. 317.232.9100.
- Robinson Mini-Grant Programs for K-12 Service Learning, c/o Constitutional Rights Foundation, 601 S. Kingley Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90005; tel. 213.487.5590, ext. 108; grants are up to \$1,000.
- Side by Side Grants, The Center for Youth As Resources, 3901 North Meridian, Suite 345, Indianapolis, IN 46208; The grant funds up to \$2,000. It must be written by students. The teacher is allowed to provide feedback. Once the proposal is complete, students meet in front of a judging panel. Students can add additional information, ask questions, etc.
- Teaching Tolerance Magazine, 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104; fax 334.264.7310; this funds up to \$2,000. It has no deadline, though that may change.
- If you would like to connect your class or school with an international partner for a service-learning project there are many resources available. The International Contacts, Pen Pals and Exchanges section of the Global Education Resources on page 143 lists multiple resources for making student-to-student, classroom-to-classroom or school-to-school connections.

Finally, if you want to see your international partner class up close, try the Indiana University's Global Interactive Academic Network, and you might be able to arrange an interactive real-time video link. Contact information for the program is included on page 141 in the Indiana-Based Global Resources section of the Global Education Resources.

SAMPLE SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

The following projects were carried out at Tecumseh Middle School in Lafayette, Indiana:

- **Sewing a quilt with an environmental theme.** When students created their quilt, they included words in foreign languages and studied how other countries deal with recycling issues.
- **Creating a bilingual community calendar.** Students wanted to welcome non-English-speaking newcomers to their community and to help other members of the community better understand the new residents. The calendar included resource opportunities, activities for youth, and other useful information in Spanish. The calendar information in English included cultural items from many Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. With this information, students hoped to convey that there is diversity among Hispanic people.
- **Making a memorial garden.** After studying Japanese American internment, students decided to turn the school courtyard into a Japanese garden as a memorial to historical events. They raised money for the project including a commemorative plaque and completed the garden themselves. Now, teachers and students enjoy walking through the garden. The tour inspires them to make a positive difference themselves.

International Service Projects at Tecumseh Middle School

To learn about another culture in greater detail, students at Tecumseh pick an issue that interests them and do research on how other countries deal with it. For example, when my students wanted to combat racism, they asked if African countries have racism. Their next thought was that this was a "stupid" question because the majority of the population of most African countries is black. I encouraged the class to examine the question anyway. To their surprise, they learned that the populations of African countries are quite diverse, and one country may contain several cultural groups. Many people feel a strong sense of loyalty to their cultural group, or tribe. This is called "tribalism." Tanzania has 127 tribes, each with its own culture and language. Tribes and tribal members may come into conflict over land, political rights, customs, and many other issues. In some cases, it may be considered more acceptable to marry a person of another religion than a person of another tribe, although intermarriage of both types does take place.

To learn about how other cultures deal with a particular topic, I suggest to my students that they contact the International Center at a nearby university. After the students choose the country they want to explore, they use the local university International Center to help them contact a student from that country, who gives them the address of his or her school with contact names for pen pal activities. To save on postage, I place all the pen pal letters going to a school in one box and mail it.

One year, after my students helped a school in an African country by sending them books, our African sister school started a service-learning project of its own. In that project, students created a peer-tutoring program using the books we sent. We believe our service project really had an impact.

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