



Section Four: *Service Learning Projects*

Overview

Service learning is where the theory of civic engagement crosses over to real world experience.

A great deal of the research on civic engagement and learning about civics focuses on the importance of service learning opportunities. Students learn valuable skills like communication, organization, teamwork, empathy and follow-through as they experience authentic learning and humbling satisfaction by helping others in their community.

Service learning is often seen as more appropriate for high school and college students, but with proper planning and guidance, elementary school students can develop important skills and help a great number of people in the process as well.

Civic Concepts

This activity will explore the following civic concepts: *empathy, service to others, participation and involvement in the community, communication, organization, teamwork, sharing.*

Key Objective

To get students to understand the needs of people in their community by participating in a service project of their choosing.

Activity

Activity 11: Participating in a Service Learning Project - *learning about people with needs by serving others in the community*

Activity 11: Participating in a Service Learning Project

Students learn empathy by helping others.

Step One

Explain to your students that we have a long history of helping others in need in this country. Ask them if they can think of some organizations that are known for assisting others and examples of when they have seen this happen.

Step Two

Share the list of service ideas with your students. Ask them to select one and to do some research about what organizations do this work, when they were founded, and whom they help. (This can be done individually or in groups) Have them write one or two paragraphs about the organization. Then allow them to report their results back to the class.

Step Three

As a class, vote on one or two organizations or activities your class will become involved in (coat drive, canned food drive, pen pals to the elderly, etc.).

Step Four

Convene a small committee who will draft a letter, email or phone script to contact the organization to invite a representative in to explain more about what they do. This could be done just for your class, or for a broader impact, as a school assembly.

Step Five

Working within the rules and requirements of your school and the organization, have your students participate in one (or more) of the service learning opportunities.

Service Learning Project Ideas

Below is a list of service learning ideas that can be adopted and adapted by your class or perhaps even the entire school.

1. **Food Drive** - Students learn empathy and of the needs of others as they collect food for the hungry in the Hudson Valley.
2. **Coat Drive** - Students learn empathy and gain awareness of a less fortunate population close to home as they collect slightly worn coats for those in need in the Hudson Valley.
3. **Gloves and Hats** - Students learn empathy and the needs of others as they collect new gloves, mittens and hats for those in need in the Hudson Valley.
4. **Pen Pals with Seniors** - Students learn appreciation and the value of human connection as they write and send cards to a person currently in one of the area's assisted living centers.
5. **Book Drive** - Students learn the importance of a literate citizenry in a participatory democracy as they help others by collecting books for an under supplied library.
6. **Peer to Peer Tutoring** - Students reinforce learning skills by helping others improve their skills as peer-to-peer tutors.
7. **Holiday Cards to Troops** - Students learn appreciation for the troops and about the sacrifice they make and send holiday cards to the sailors on the USS Roosevelt.
8. **Care Packages to Troops** - Students learn to consider the needs of others as they design, assemble and send "care packages" to our service personnel overseas.
9. **Adopt a Veteran** - Students learn about the sacrifice of others as they identify and learn the story of an American veteran.
10. **Beautify Your School** - Students learn about important social issues as they create murals in their school or classroom.
11. **Meet the Movers and Shakers** - Students learn about important "movers and shakers" in American history as they research and portray them at school or community events.
12. **Game Night with Seniors** - Students gain insight and learn from the experiences of the older generation through a night of board games played with residents of local assisted living centers.
13. **History in Your Own Backyard** - Students learn about the contributions of important people and industries in their community by researching them and creating "tabletop museums" for display in their school, local library, village or town hall or community center.

14. **Shelter Supply Drive** - Students learn of the needs of others as they collect supplies needed for Dutchess County residents living in shelters.
15. **Oral History Project for Your School** - Students learn about the importance of their school by interviewing past graduates from various fields and professions.
16. **Talent Show or Music** - Students learn the pleasure of bringing joy to others as they organize and perform concerts or talent shows for people in assisted living facilities.
17. **Plastic Round Up** - Students raise awareness of the problems associated with plastic pollution and make their community cleaner by organizing a plastic collection and recycling program.
18. **Tree sales** - Students discover the importance of cleaning the air, reducing erosion, and providing habitats conducting a tree sapling sale.
19. **Make Your School Lunchroom more Eco Friendly** - Students raise awareness and reduce waste by organizing a program to reduce plastic use and food waste in their school lunchrooms.
20. **Birthday Balls for Those in Need** - Students raise money for a local charity hosting evening events for Eleanor and Franklin's Birthdays (Oct. 11 and Jan. 30) inspired by and patterned after the President's March of Dimes birthday balls of the past.

Extension Activity Ideas

- 1) Ask your students to journal about their experiences with the project. What are they learning about the issue they are trying to assist with? What skills is their involvement helping them to develop or master? How does participating in helping others make them feel?
- 2) Create a service chart to tally and track the impact your students' participation in the service learning activity is having.
- 3) Collect and share stories from the people who are served by the project your class has chosen.
- 4) Invite someone who was served to your class, or school, to talk about how your students helped them and what their help meant to them.
- 5) Conduct a “service fair” by inviting some of the organizations on the list to set up a booth at open house or some other school sponsored event.

NOTES