



Module 1: Livable Communities: What Are They? How Do We Create Them?

Introduction

In this first module we present a series of goals and performances for students that explore community, local government and citizen-enacted change. Learning activities require students to reflect on what makes a community a good place to live. Students also are introduced to ways of participating in civic life both individually and collectively. Finally, students begin to confront the question: “How can I, working with a small group of like-minded people, bring about meaningful change in my community?”

In addition, the learning activities of this module introduce the online resources and skills that will be used in greater depth as the unit proceeds.

Lesson 1: You and Community

Understanding Goal: What is a community?

Introduction:

In this opening lesson, students role-play to explore the meaning of community. Students consider how and why communities form and think about the decision-making processes both among one's own community members and those of other communities.

Time Span: 1-2 days

Resources Needed:

- Handout, *Questions for Your Community, Part 1*
- Handout, *Questions for Your Community, Part 2*
- Handout, *Participating in a Community*
- *Student Voices* Speak Out discussions, <http://www.student-voices.org/SpeakOutList.aspx?LocId=1000>

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation

Performances of Understanding:

After being introduced to the *Student Voices* curriculum, students engage in a role-playing activity to gain insight into some of the elements that define and create community.

Procedures:

A. The first step in this lesson is to familiarize your students with the *Student Voices* curriculum and what they will learn over the course of the semester. Key points to highlight include:

- Students will learn about how political and economic decisions are made in their local communities by becoming actively involved in a local project.
- Students will make active and regular use of the *Student Voices* Web site to explore political concepts, conduct research and discuss current issues with their peers across the country.
- Students as a class will identify an important local issue or need and research it.
- Students then will develop and implement an action plan to have their own

views heard as they work to improve the community.

- Consequently, students will learn how to become agents of change within their community and school.

B. The second phase of the lesson is a brief role-playing activity designed to encourage students to think about the concept of community.

1. Begin by simply asking all students to get up from their desks and move about the room to form small “communities” of 3-5 students.

NOTE: Do not define community for the students. Allow the class to have free movement and choice about what constitutes a community.

2. Once students have self-selected their community, give all students a copy of the handout, *Questions for Your Community, Part 1*. Require all students in the class to remain standing as they complete Part 1.
3. Then provide each community two desks and *Questions for Your Community, Part 2*. As the questions for Part 2 are being answered, students should be allowed to use the two available desks, as they deem best.
4. Have each community report their answers to the whole class. Record the highlights of each community’s findings.
5. Next, ask the groups to combine to form two new and larger communities without desks. Again, give students a copy of the handout, *Questions for Your Community, Part 1*, and ask students to follow the directions provided and answer the questions.
6. As in the first round, next make available two desks for each of the large communities and the handout, *Questions for Your Community, Part 2*. After students answer the questions to Part 2, the Presenter for each community reports on their work to the entire class.
7. Reconvene the whole class back in their seats and hold a class discussion on what they just experienced:
 - a. As a class, discuss the students’ responses to Part 2 of the handout. Encourage students to use examples from real life or from the community exercise that they just completed to defend their answers.
 - b. Ask students to consider their relationship with members of their smaller communities compared to their relationship with the larger group. Explain that the first community exercise was an example of “direct democracy,” where all citizens participate in the decision-making process. The second community exercise might have been an example of “representative democracy,” where citizens choose representatives to speak on their behalf in the decision-making process. The United States federal government is a representative democracy. State governments are also representative democracies, as are most local governments, although

in a few smaller localities, especially in New England, direct democracy may still be found.

- c. Ask students to consider how they decided to give out the chairs in their communities. Did they give the chairs to those who may have needed to sit down, such as the recorders, or were the chairs given to whoever wanted them? The limited number of chairs represents the economic principle of “scarcity.” In a democracy, people ideally engage in democratic deliberation on how to distribute limited resources in a fair way. In other words, communities must figure out ways to satisfy unlimited wants with limited resources (like chairs).
- d. Students may note that they did not care who was allowed to sit and who had to remain standing. If this is the case, discuss how having an interest in the decisions and resources at stake acts as a motivator for citizens to become involved in community decision-making.

In the final phase of the lesson, provide all students with a copy of the handout *Participating in a Community* and allow students to complete the survey. As a whole group ask students to respond to the reflection prompts.

- During this time, if they are not already, students should be encouraged to visit and utilize the Speak Outs of the *Student Voices* Web site to begin to discuss and engage their peers across the country about a host of issues. Their participation should continue throughout the semester to sharpen their deliberation on current issues and to help them become aware of others’ points of view. The discussions are password-protected and moderated by *Student Voices* staff and are updated frequently with new topics. To obtain the password for your class, provide your contact and school information via e-mail to studentvoices@asc.upenn.edu.

Assessments:

Assessments for all activities are informal. The teacher encourages students to be thorough and detailed in their descriptions and analysis.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways:

How to Use the Student Voices Website (runtime = 10:48), <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=1113>. This is a short instructional video that shows what is available from the Student Voices Web site and how to use it. "How to Use the Student Voices Website" is a great primer or refresher for students and teachers who wish to utilize the project's online resources and discussions.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard I.A. What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve?

Lesson 2: What makes a community a good place to live? What would make my community better?

Understanding Goal: What is a livable community?

Introduction:

Is your community friendly to children? What makes a community a good place to live? What should be improved? These questions are central to this introductory lesson that challenges students both to understand the concept of livable communities and to explore the ways that community engagement and local government can improve the quality of life for children and young people. A list of issues will be created, forming the basis for their Youth Issues Agenda project.

Time Span: 1-3 days

Resources Needed:

- Student access to the list of finalists and winners of the National Civic League’s All-America City Award. These cities are found on the National Civic League’s website: <http://www.ncl.org>.
- Application and Instructions for the All-America City Award, http://www.ncl.org/aac/2007/application_options.html.
- Sporting News.com, Best Sports Cities, 2006: Who, Where, and How? <http://www.sportingnews.com/yourturn/viewtopic.php?t=113586>
- CNN Money.com, Best Places to Live, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2006/> (2007 is now available)
- Country Home, Best Green Cities in America, <http://www.countryhome.com/greencities/>
- A free blog and wiki obtained from <http://edublogs.org/>. A free blog may also be obtained through Blogger, Google’s free blogging service (www.blogger.com). Free wiki spaces also are available through <http://www.wikispaces.com/>.
- (Optional) Worksheets: *Community Interviews* and *Small Group Summary*

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Performances of Understanding:

After a discussion of what makes a city a good place to live, students work in groups to

identify the most important traits of a livable community. Students make a list of the top 10 traits that they believe make for a livable community—especially for children and young people. Students brainstorm ideas on how to make their own community a better place to live. Each group should make a list of specific strengths and specific weaknesses of their own communities.

The class is then led on a discussion about their own community and which strengths and weaknesses were identified by the individual groups. A list will be made from each of the issues mentioned by the students that will become the basis for their Youth Issues Agenda project in the Youth Issues Agenda section of this module.

The class should post their findings to the class wiki or class blog.

Procedures:

Begin the lesson by introducing the most recent list of the National Civic League’s All-American cities. Share with students the criteria for selection as illustrated by the All-American City application form and instructions, available on the NCL website. Then use other lists of “best cities” to provide students with illustrations of different criteria for what makes a place livable.

Students should continue the discussion in small groups and develop their own list of the top 10 traits that make a community livable. Each group should make a list of specific strengths and specific weaknesses of their own communities. Encourage students to think about the elements that make a community a good place for children and young people. Prompt students to think about pedestrian-friendly cities. Would this model be valuable in your community? Students might also be encouraged to think about how bicycles contribute to the overall atmosphere of the cities and how they foster independence for young people.

CREATING THE ISSUES LIST:

1. Ask students to write down five community strengths and five community problems individually.

NOTE: “Community” can be defined in a variety of ways. It might be used to mean the neighborhood in which students live, the neighborhood in which they go to school, the school itself or some other definition entirely. Consider whether you want to provide students with a definition of community to work from, or whether you would rather they decide among themselves what definition of community they want to use.

2. Have students mark which community strength they are most proud of and which community problem is the most important to address.
3. In their small groups, students should share their ideas on what works well in their community and what could be improved.
4. Ask the class which items came up most frequently in their groups and write these on the board. Begin to categorize the specific items under broader headings. (Students are more likely to find issues discussed in the media in terms of such broad categories.) Make sure to lead students toward ideas that can be acted on by local government. This activity also helps

students to see their specific issues as part of the larger community discussion. NOTE: Be sure to save this list for Youth Issues Agenda section of this module.

Example of how individual issues can be categorized:

Specific Issues	CATEGORY
litter; abandoned buildings	ENVIRONMENT
large class size; school repairs	EDUCATION
unemployment; more businesses	ECONOMY
drugs; violence; theft	CRIME
terrorism; safe neighborhoods	SECURITY
need for insurance; hospitals	HEALTH
others...	TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING

In the final exercise, students then participate in a brainstorming session in their groups to develop ideas on how to improve their own community. The ideas should be recorded. The best ideas should be posted online to the class blog or class wiki. *Student Voices Tips and Hints for Teachers* provides instruction on how to sign up for and use a blog or wiki.

Assessments:

Assessments for all activities are informal. The teacher encourages students to be thorough and detailed in their descriptions and analysis.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways:

Community Interviews:

Hand out the *Community Interviews* worksheet and ask students to use it to interview three people in their community, asking them to identify areas in which the community could improve. Students can use family or friends for these interviews. Encourage safety in selection of people to interview. Students conduct interviews of community members and bring the completed handouts to class and then meet together in their small groups to fill out one *Small Group Summary* worksheet per group. The issues that come up most frequently in the small group discussion can be used to help form the Youth Issues Agenda.

Complementary Web sites:

The following are good sources for additional research or background information on livable communities.

NewUrbanism.Org: <http://www.newurbanism.org/newurbanism.html>.

NewUrbanism.org was started in 1998, and has since grown to become a leading informational Web site promoting good urbanism, smart transportation, transit-oriented development and sustainability. NewUrbanism.org is independently owned and operated and has no connection to any other organization, corporation or public entity.

Sierra Club, Stop Sprawl: Livable Communities:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/community/>.

The Sierra Club is an environmental organization founded in 1892 in San Francisco by the well-known preservationist, John Muir, who subsequently became the organization's first president. The Web site has numerous reports and fact sheets available for download that provide information on, and encourage the development of, livable communities. The introductory note from this page reads:

“People need livable communities and a high quality of life. The attractiveness of older small towns and a scattering of newer developments demonstrate the appeal of certain characteristics. Lively downtown areas, streets designed for pedestrians as much as autos, a scale and pattern of development that allows us to meet everyday needs by walking are all key factors in ensuring cities provide a high quality of life.”

Other Activities:

- Students frequently enjoy collaborating on a class blog or class wiki. The performances of understanding undertaken by students in this curriculum lend themselves to being exhibited in this fashion. A free blog and wiki may be obtained from <http://edublogs.org/>. Blogger, Google's free blogging service (www.blogger.com), is another source for a free blog. Free wiki spaces also are available through <http://www.wikispaces.com/>.

The advantage of posting online is that students can share findings and research with one another and with family members. In addition, some students find the ability to immediately see their work in one of these formats highly rewarding.

- Have students look at their local newspaper (either in hard copy or online from the *Student Voices* Web site) and write down two issues that they found in the newspaper that concern their community.

Correlation to National Standards for Civics and Government:

Standard I.A. What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve?

Understanding Goals: How can local government enhance a community?

Introduction:

Students gain an understanding of the array of responsibilities that belongs to local government. Students reflect on how local government affects their daily lives and begin to explore how local government can influence whether a community is sufficiently supportive of young people.

Students think about the goods and services offered by their local government and make estimates of how they think their own local government budget “pie” is divided among categories of expenditures. Students learn how the budget for their community is created. They research when the budget process takes place, who proposes the budget, who passes the budget, and where citizens can have an impact in that process.

Time Span: 3-5 days

Resources Needed:

- Handout: *City Operating Budget*
- Handout: *City Operating Revenue*
- Handout: *Local Budget Information Search*
- Access to the official Web site of your local government. Web sites can be found by performing a Google search, by using the database of USA.gov site, http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Local_Government/Cities.shtml, or by using the StateLocalGov.net database, <http://www.statelocalgov.net/>, a directory of official state, county and city websites.
- A copy of the Comprehensive Plan for your local government unit. These long-term budget and development plans are usually updated every 5-10 years, although some local governments revise them more frequently. Typically, the plans are downloadable from the official Web site. Copies also are usually available in person at city hall or the main administrative offices. An example from the City of Philadelphia is located at: <http://www.phila.gov/reports/index.html>.
- A copy of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for your local government. These plans are completed every year or every other year and are guidelines for the improvements that will be made by local government for buildings, facilities and other tangible items. They are usually available online but can be obtained

from city hall or the main administrative offices. Here is an example, the City of Baltimore's CIP, <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/planning/cip.html>.

- A copy of the annual budget for your local government. Budgets almost always are accessible online. Here is an example from the City of Williamsburg, Virginia, <http://www.ci.williamsburg.va.us/dept/manager/budgmsg.htm>.
- (Optional) Camcorder or audio recording equipment for the creation of a Public Service Announcement.
- (Optional) A free blog and wiki obtained from <http://edublogs.org/>. A free blog may also be obtained through Blogger, Google's free blogging service (www.blogger.com). Free wiki spaces also are available through <http://www.wikispaces.com/>.
- (Optional) iTunes allows for the posting of podcasts. A further explanation of how to proceed in creating your own podcast is located at <http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcaststechspecs.html>.
- *Student Voices Speak Out: Summer jobs: A window into taxes and wages*, <http://www.student-voices.org/SpeakOut.aspx?Id=614>

Skill Sets: Analysis, interpretation, crafting a persuasive argument, fluency with computer software

Performances of Understanding:

Students gain an understanding of the functions of local government by observing and analyzing official documents and Web sites. Students then create user-generated content that supports or describes an ongoing program or offers opportunities for a change in local government.

Procedures:

Begin the lesson by allowing students to browse their local government Web site or provide them with a document downloaded previously that details the different departments and agencies of local government. Students should collectively develop as comprehensive a list as possible of different functions of local government.

LOCAL BUDGET EXERCISE:

1. Ask students to form pairs and ask each pair to create a list of goods and services that their local government provides. Goods are physical products that can be delivered to whoever buys them and can be sold to someone else. Water is an example of a good provided by local government. Services are things that have benefit for citizens but are not a physical item and cannot be owned. For example, snow plowing is a service provided by local government.
2. Students should share their thoughts with the class to create a class list of ideas.
3. Explain the concept of Operating Budget vs. Capital Budget

- Operating Budget: Yearly budget that is used to pay for annual services, salaries and operations of the city government.
 - Capital Budget: Source of funds for large one-time projects, such as building new recreation centers or schools, upgrading the airport or improving a city's water treatment plant.
4. Ask students to mark each of the items on their class list of government goods or services as either Capital or Operating costs.
 5. Ask the class as a whole to group the individual items on the list into larger categories.
NOTE: If possible, use the categories on the actual city budget pie chart as a guide for students.
 6. Distribute *City Operating Budget* worksheet. Ask students to copy the list of all the items in the Operating Budget from the class list to the box in their handout.
 7. Using the circle diagram in the handout, ask students to create a pie chart of what they think the division of items will look like in the actual city operating budget. The goods and services they include in the pie chart are also known as expenditures, or things that cost the local government money to provide. In the budget process, expenditures are paid for with revenues, or government income that comes from taxes, state and federal aid, fines, donations from charities and foundations and other sources. Encourage students to create a key for the items so that they can share their charts.
 8. Make available to students a copy of the actual city operating budget pie chart (if available). (If a pie chart is not available, provide students with data or summary tables on the budget that is available.) Ask students to identify similarities and differences between their chart and the actual one. Require students to identify as many areas as possible that have personally affected their lives. The goal is for students to see the wide range of activities that local government is responsible for that directly influences students' environment and daily activities.
 9. (Optional) Ask students to create a list of revenue sources for their city's operating budget. Using the student-created list, have students use *City Operating Revenue* worksheet to create a pie chart based on what share that they think each category of revenue contributes to the local government budget. Compare students' projections with actual budget revenues.
 10. Explain to students that most local governments have "balanced budget" laws, meaning that the amount of money spent by local government to provide goods and services to the community must equal the amount of revenue collected by local government in taxes, state and federal aid and other sources of money. Generally, local governments only allow budget deficits - situations where the local government spends more than it takes in - in extreme situations, such as for disaster relief. Budget surpluses occur when the local government takes in more money than it spends. Budget surpluses can be used to increase government services, cut taxes or they can be saved in a "rainy day fund" to be used if the local government is faced with a budget deficit in a future year.

After successful completion of the budget exercise, conduct a whole group discussion on

the different functions of local government. Urge students to describe local government departments or functions that they have witnessed working well, as well as those that could use improvement.

LOCAL BUDGET DECISION-MAKERS EXERCISE:

1. Hand out a copy of *Local Budget Information Search* worksheet to each student.
2. Working alone, in pairs or in their issue research teams, have students conduct the research needed to fill in answers to the handout.
 - If Internet access is available: Instruct students to use online resources to find one or more of the answers to the questions on the worksheet.
 - If Internet access is not available: Distribute the materials you printed prior to class for students to use to complete the worksheet.

Ask students to return to their groups and think of a task of local government that they would like to research further and subsequently report on to the whole class. Research might involve interviewing participants in a program, conducting online research or reading local newspapers either online or in hard copy. Students should then create user-generated content that either supports or describes an ongoing program run by local government or takes a position that a change is needed in services provided by local government. Examples include:

- Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) that identifies a community issue or event. Students should either suggest a course of action for improvement or explain the benefits to the community of the current arrangements. This can be a video or audio PSA and should be made available to the web via a podcast.
- Students create a presentation on the concept of livable communities focusing on their views of the livability of their own community. They develop a collaborative report using a wiki. A presentation to the class is made using PowerPoint, Keynote, Zoho Show (www.zoho.com) or other presentation software.
- Students create a blog that highlights issues and concerns of community interest.

Note: Be sure to save the budget and planning documents for later use.

The Speak Out *Summer jobs: A window into taxes and wages*, which asks students to reflect on work experiences, brings budget concepts full circle and examines how wages and taxes affect the community. The Speak Out includes a brief streaming video report.

Assessments

Informal assessment by teacher based on accuracy of information and skill in research.

Subsequent assessment is completed by teachers and classmates on: 1) accuracy and clarity of the information presented, and 2) degree to which the completed task persuades others.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard I.A. What is civic life?

Standard V.E. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Understanding Goals: How can a small group working together bring about change?

Introduction:

“Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” These words by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) were first written in 1987. Twenty years later they are still meaningful to the many people who seek sustainability for their community and their world.

In this lesson students explore the concept of sustainability and examine how other groups and individuals have worked at the local level to bring about change in environmental policies and practices.

Time Span: 3-5 days

Resources Needed:

- Handout: *J. Timmons Roberts, Saving the Earth One Place at a Time: Agitating for Change in Local Government*
- Handout: *Survey of School and Community Sustainability*

Skill Sets: Data collection, data analysis

Performances of Understanding:

Students develop an understanding of the concept of sustainability and complete a survey of environmental practices and attitudes in their school and community.

Procedures:

Start class by having students read the essay by Timmons Roberts, *Saving the Earth One Place at a Time*. Undertake a class discussion on the themes of the essay and the types of projects described.

- Could similar projects work in your community?
- Is there a need for projects like the ones described?

At the conclusion of the discussion provide students with the *Survey of School and Community Sustainability* handout. A sustainable school is one that considers the ecological and ethical implications of daily routines. The survey that students are about to complete explores the state of sustainability of their school. While the survey

primarily focuses on the school's sustainability, additional questions ask students to collect data on the community.

Before sending students out to complete the survey, however, the class should hold a discussion about why sustainability matters. Points that can be identified by students include:

- A school consumes resources, buys products and produces waste. How these tasks are completed can make an impact on a large scale.
- People care deeply about the environmental effects of institutions and would like for change to occur but frequently feel that one individual acting alone cannot make a difference.
- Public schools are local government institutions and should be challenged about the effects of the daily choices that those in them make.
- Gathering data matters. We make decisions based on what we know.

Students should pool their results after collecting data. A class discussion should then be held on the meaning of their survey results. Points to consider are:

- What do we now know about the sustainability of the school and the community?
- What seems to be working well?
- Are there areas that need to be addressed and improved?
- How can we get others interested in the issue?
- Who are key decision-makers? If unknown, how might we find out?

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Other Activities:

Ecological Footprint Quiz, <http://ecofoot.org/>, is based on national consumption averages and is meant to give you an idea of your Ecological Footprint relative to other people in the country you live in. It is not highly detailed, but should give most people an idea of where they stand.

Community Youth Action Project, Sustainable High Schools, <http://syc-cjs.org/cyap/tiki-index.php?page=Sustainable+High+Schools>, the Sustainable High Schools Project of British Columbia aims to bring together secondary students, teachers and administrators who want to make their high school communities models of sustainability. It empowers students to lead initiatives that will generate greater social, ecological and economic sustainability through infrastructure upgrades, additions to curricula and enhancing community members' ability to communicate and work together to achieve a common vision. The Web site describes the initiative and has files available for downloading.

Indivisible: Stories of the American Community, <http://www.indivisible.org/>, is a national documentary project exploring community life in America today. Through

photographs and recorded voices, Indivisible focuses on the real-life stories of struggle and change in 12 communities—from Delray Beach, Florida, to Ithaca, New York; from the North Pacific Coast of Alaska to Chicago’s Southwest side; from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas to the Yaak Valley, Montana. In these places people are patrolling streets, building homes, reviving towns, protecting ecosystems and otherwise finding ways to improve their lives and surroundings. Their experiences, captured through the creative lens and on audiotape, provide the content for Indivisible, presented in a traveling museum exhibition, a touring free postcard exhibit, a book and this Web site.

An Inconvenient Truth. This Oscar-winning documentary captures former Vice President Al Gore waging a campaign against global warming. Gore makes a sobering impression on the audiences who hear his message, urging them to act "boldly, quickly and wisely" before it's too late to act at all. (Rated PG.)

Assessments

Informal assessment by teacher of class discussion.

Assessment of the quality of the data collected and the verbal analysis of the data.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard I.A. What is civic life?

Standard V.E. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Understanding Goals: Why doesn't everyone vote in elections in the United States?

Introduction: Another way to become engaged in civic life is through voting. In this lesson students examine patterns of voting in the United States and determine the factors that lower voter turnout.

Time Span: 2-3 days

Resources Needed:

- *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004* (P20-556), located on the U. S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration Web site, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>. The full report is 20 pages. Excerpts are given below.
- Handout: *Questions on American Voting Patterns*
- Handout: *Understanding Voting Rates*
- Handout: *Tables on Voter Registration and Voting, 2004*

Skill Sets: Data analysis, reading and interpreting tables

Performances of Understanding:

Relying on data found at the U.S. Census Bureau Web site, students acquire basic knowledge about those who register and vote in American elections. Working with partners or in research teams students analyze data and describe trends in registration and voting. Students should write up their summary findings on the class wiki or class blog.

Procedure:

Begin the lesson by providing students with the necessary handouts. The goal for students is to analyze U.S. Census Bureau data in both table and written form to gain insight into the American voting population.

Students collect data by completing the handout, *Questions on American Voting Patterns*. These data can be found using the Census Bureau handouts. A class discussion should take place to help students reflect on the material and explore the meaning of the data. Possible prompts for students include:

- What obstacles reduce youth voting rates?

- Based on the data, what is the relationship between voting rate and group or demographic affiliation? (Examples include: level of education, income, military service, residence in a particular region of the country, gender and age). Do you have any explanation as to why these factors may influence voting?
- How might youth voting be encouraged?
- Does voting matter? Does one vote make a difference?

After students have had a chance to discuss these issues as a class, they should post their individual views on the class wiki or blog.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Optional Activities:

18 and Voting (runtime = 10:39),

<http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=896>. This video follows *Student Voices* voter registration assemblies at several Philadelphia high schools, asking students why they think it is important to register and vote. It also provides information about how to vote and the history of voting rights.

Voting: The Power of One (runtime = 10:39),

<http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=1114>. This short video explains the history and significance of the right to vote in the United States. Many different perspectives are discussed and excuses for not voting are debunked.

Stephen J. Dubner and Steven D. Levitt, “Why Vote? A Swiss Turnout-Boosting Experiment,” *New York Times Magazine* (November 6, 2005),

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/06/magazine/06freak.html>. This article works to make sense of voting patterns and participation, with consideration given to what may drive people to cast a ballot when one vote rarely matters. The article could serve as an interesting introduction to the value of voting.

Vote: The Machinery of Democracy, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote/index.html>, is an online exhibit of the Smithsonian, National Museum of American History. This interactive exhibit explores how ballots and voting systems have evolved over the years as a response to political, social and technological change, transforming the ways in which Americans vote.

Assessments

Informal assessment by teacher based on accuracy of information and skill in research.

Formal assessment of writing completed by students based on 1) clarity of ideas, 2) accuracy of the information, 3) insights made on the voting process.

Correlation to National Standards for Civics and Government:

Standard V.E. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Lesson 6: Youth Issues Agenda

Understanding Goals: How can a small group of individuals improve their community and make a positive impact on civic life?

Introduction: At the heart of the *Student Voices* curriculum is a class project that seeks to improve civic life and to promote needed change in the community. The lessons provided so far have sought to help students practice using their own analytic tools, to make the class aware of valuable online resources, and to suggest possible ways for students to make their voices heard using modern technologies. Students should now set their sights higher and work to be agents of change.

As a group, the class will identify a need, develop their goals and undertake an action plan to improve civic life in their community. Work on the project will continue over the rest of the semester. There are many possibilities. The *Student Voices* Web site provides examples and videos of previously completed student work and provides links to communicate with other students.

Resources Needed:

- List of community issues generated by the class in Lesson 1
- Worksheet: *What's the Issue?*
- Handout: *Evaluating Our Community*
- Handout: *Obstacles and Strategies*
- Worksheet: *Writing an Action Plan*
- Access to *Student Voices* in the News Web site, (<http://student-voices.org/ShowPageInternal.aspx?Name=Student%20Voices%20in%20the%20News>)
- Handout by Otis White, President of Civic Strategies, Inc., "A Good, Simple Theory for Change," found online at <http://www.civic-strategies.com/onlib/index.htm>

Time Span: Until completion

Skill sets: Collaborating with others, analyzing issues, developing an agenda, implementing a plan of action

Performance of Understanding:

Students collaboratively design and carry out a group project that enhances civic life, broadly conceived, within their community.

Procedure:

When students are comfortable with the goals of this curriculum and at ease with the online resources that enhance research and the modern technologies that facilitate communication, introduce the **Youth Issues Agenda**.

1. The first task for students is to identify the project they wish to undertake. Using the list of issues from Lesson 1, ask students, individually or in groups, to write about the issue they have found to be the most important one in their community— and the issue they believe is most important for local officials to address. (Students might want to use the *What's the Issue?* Worksheet as their writing template. Teachers may want to fill in the template using one issue.) They should:

- Name the issue.
- Describe the issue and give examples of it — What is it? What does it look like? — and so on.
- Describe why they think the issue is important, including any information collected from the interviews or survey on what other people in the community think about the issue or any census data collected.
- Teachers are encouraged to send students' writing to *Student Voices* (e-mail: studentvoices@asc.upenn.edu) for consideration for posting as a story or to send the writing to their local newspaper as a letter-to-the-editor.

The class may find the *Evaluating Our Community* handout useful in thinking through community needs and options for action. Students should have access to the *Student Voices* Web site to see what other groups have done previously. This may help spark their own ideas and creativity.

2. The next step is for students to devise a plan of action. The *Obstacles and Strategies* and *Writing an Action Plan* handouts should be made available to all students. The completed *Writing an Action Plan* handouts should be kept during the semester and referenced periodically as students research and put together their projects. In addition, the handout will be needed in Module 4: *Making Your Voice Heard*.

- Explain to students that the approaches to address their issue are actually suggestions for how local government can change public policy, or the system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action and funding priorities for a given issue.
- Explain to students that each alternative they consider will have support from some members of the community, but not others. When making decisions about public policy, it is important to consider which constituencies will support a particular plan and which might oppose it (more information is presented in Module 3: *People Who Influence Local Government*). For example, if a city considers banning smoking in restaurants, one constituency that might support the ban is restaurant workers who

don't like working in a smoky environment. However, restaurant owners who are concerned that they will lose customers if smoking is banned are a constituency that might not support the ban.

- Ask students to think about what constituencies in their community might support each of their alternatives and what constituencies in the community might not support their ideas.
- First working in small groups, ask students to brainstorm different ways to approach the project and report back to the entire class. The entire class then engages in an evaluation of the suggested approaches seeking to find the most workable methods and tactics. Students then work together in groups to devise the plan of action.

3. Tasks need to be assigned to individuals and groups and a timeline for completion must be developed. Substantial class time will be needed to work on the Youth Issues Agenda project. The class wiki may be used to assist in describing the goals and reporting action items.

The remainder of the semester will be devoted to the project. Other lessons in this curriculum are designed to a) provide additional information that may be of value in implementing an action plan, or b) provide background knowledge on the workings and politics of local government.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Other Activities:

There are a number of Web sites designed to encourage young people to become more civically active. Students may want to examine these sites to collect additional ideas about possible projects. Two places to start are:

- **Do Something**, <http://www.dosomething.org/>, is a clearinghouse that provides information for individuals wishing to volunteer in their community. The site also hosts a listing of projects undertaken by groups.
- **Idealist.org**, <http://www.idealists.org/kt/>, is the website for a nonprofit organization called Action Without Borders based in New York, NY; Portland, OR; and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The goal of the Web site is to help people find the resources and support they need to help themselves and their communities.

Assessments:

Both students and teacher should complete a final evaluation of the project. Items to be evaluated include: development of a sound action plan, implementing the identified goals and the impact of the project on civic life.

Correlation to National Standards for Civics and Government:

Standard V. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

Standard V. A. What is citizenship?

Standard V. B. What are the rights of citizens?

Standard V. C. What are the responsibilities of citizens?

Standard V. D. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?

Standard V. E. How can citizens take part in civic life?