

Group B Module Title: Engaging your High School on an Issue

Description

This lesson challenges and supports students to explore the process of developing a plan of action around an identified civic issue. Students will begin by brainstorming current issues that are of concern, importance and/or interest to them and their peers. They will then discuss various modes of civic action that are/can be taken up by youth to build awareness and contribute to positive change around these issues. In small groups of 5-6 people, students will move to develop a plan of action around an identified issue that they can implement back in their respective schools or communities. Each group's plan of action will be shared with the larger group after which a vote will take place to determine the plan perceived to be most effective based on voting criteria provided.

Objectives

Students will:

1. Analyze issues
2. Understand the varying nature of and approaches to civic engagement related to an issue(s)
3. Develop a plan of action to engage their peers at school/community in the issue

Materials

- paper for students to jot down ideas etc.
- 90 pieces of bristol board-30 per session
- Markers - LOTS!
- Voting booths
- Ballots
- pens for voting
- youth surveys

Equipment:

Students are able to use their smartphones. Access to computers/laptops.

Process (120 minutes)

Hook (10 mins)

The teacher will introduce sample issues through the horseshoe activity. Give clear instructions for activity & do a practice round to ensure all students understand task. (See slideshow.) Then move through 6-8 issues.

- **Sample Horseshoe Statements:**
 - School cafeterias should only serve healthy food.
 - Public transportation should be free.
 - Taxes should be raised to pay for post secondary education.
 - The legal voting age should be reduced to 16.
 - Beauty pageants are exploitive.
 - Teachers should interact with their students via social media.

- Marijuana should be legal in Canada.
 - Abortion should be illegal.
 - Once a student has selected their stance, debate briefly and see if students change their positioning.
- Ask students to volunteer & call out issues of their own that they are passionate or concerned about. Observe to see what issues are most common or of greatest interest.

Engage (15 mins)

Part A: Students get into pairs (based on a shared issue of interest) & discuss following guiding questions together:

- If you could, what would you change in your school/community around this issue?
- Do you need any help to change [the issue]?
- How could you get others excited about this issue?
- Why do you think people should care about this issue?
- What would you change in your school if you had the power?
- What do you think people's response will be to your issue?
- How would someone argue against your issue?

Part B: Introduce the video as an example of different approaches/modes of civic action that youth take up

A video prepared by high school students through the ON ministry 'Speak Up' initiative. This video is a useful tool to get the students thinking about different ways of engaging their own schools as well as possible, local issues. This video not only explains the initiative, but also some of the process behind the students' initiative (such as how they included voices beyond their group. A way to get students thinking.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMBTRrWREtw&feature=youtu.be>

Discuss the video & brainstorm other modes of civic action that youth use to effect change. Perhaps jot down a list of on the board.

Main Activity (30 mins)

Each pair teams up with another 2 pairs (forming groups of 5-6) students based on shared interests around a particular issue. Maximum 4 groups.

****Brainstorming:**

Have them ask themselves: Is this an issue that requires awareness raising, data collection, a petition, a campaign, lobbying, etc. One of the key messages we want them to take away from this lesson is that there are multiple ways & strategies to take action and at different levels.

Teacher provides the instructions for the class:

- Each group is to choose an issue, create a 'plan of action' and will have 25 minutes to do so
- Afterwards, each group must present their initiative to the class in 5 minutes or less. There will be a timer.
- Following the presentations there will be a vote. Discuss the voting criteria including:
 - 1) Which plan of action seemed most effective in terms of engagement & impact?

- 2) Which plan of action was communicated most effectively?
- 3) Looking at the democratic process, how well did this plan of action look at this issue from different perspectives?

Students choose an issue, create a 'plan of action' and have 25 minutes to do so
Students prepare their 5 minutes (or less) presentation of their initiative to the class

Checking for Understanding (50 mins)

Each of the groups present their plan of action to their class. They have 5 minutes or less to do so. At the end of each project, a (brief) debrief can occur where the issue, the method of engagement (such as its merits), feasibility in schools etc. are discussed (around 5 minutes). With a maximum of 4 groups – and each presentation and debrief taking no more than 10 minutes (less is fine)—**40 minutes is allocated.**

For the **remaining 10 minutes**, the students vote via secret ballot (based on discussed CRITERIA for voting) on which presentation they believe to be most effective. While the students vote, provide an explanation of voting in Canada and popcorn out some questions (listed below) - generating a discussion while voting is encouraged. Also, the voting should be done fairly officially (i.e. line behind which the line must start etc.)

Questions on Voting:

- Why do people vote?
- For whom do you vote in Canada? A party, a candidate, a leader?
- Who verifies the voting process?
- What do you need to vote?
- Can you take a picture in the polling station? What about a video?

Ask two students to each work a voting booth table and provide the ballots as students approach the table. By keeping the ballots at the table and forcing students to vote privately, the goal is to emphasize the laws governing voting and the process through which Canadians vote. Also, the students working the tables represent how some individuals engage in society (by working during elections).

Consolidation (5 mins)

- Engage in discussion about what they have learned during the session. Ask questions for clarification.

Recap (10 mins)

- Ask the students to complete the survey on the day's activities. Encourage any open discussion, thoughts, and questions to be brought forward.