

Group 1 Lesson Module – Active Citizenship Town Hall

Description

Students will reflect on the importance of civic engagement by means of a short role-playing exercise based on voter turnout of 18-24 year olds in Canada. They will brainstorm means of civic engagement for young people, examine an example of a young person who created an awareness campaign, and then role-play a town hall exercise of campaigning for an important issue. This lesson is best for classrooms of 20-30 students from the ages of 14-17.

Objectives

Students will:

- Experience hands-on civic action by thinking of ways to affect change in their communities, and then bringing that idea to life through action, collaboration, cooperation and a democratic process.
- Increase their interest in taking action in regards to civic and community responsibility, including intention for future electoral.
- Enhance their skills for participating in the electoral and political process (e.g. research, forming a point of view, providing evidence and presenting an argument).

Materials

- Group laptops/computers
- Classroom projector and speakers for Youtube video
- Chart Paper for rough drafts/brainstorming of visual aid
- Markers
- Scissors
- Glue
- Bristol boards or chart paper for final visual aids, 1 per group
- Tape
- Elections Canada “official” voting screen and ballot box
- Voting ballots, 1 per student (see template below)
- Pencils to fill in ballots and complete survey

Accommodations

This module accommodates a variety of learning styles as well as multiple intelligences. The use of an agenda will help establish a routine for this module. Furthermore, the use of pictures and videos as a form of communication will help avoid any language barriers that may exist. There will also be auditory accommodations when displaying examples of social media campaigns as well as the use of PowerPoint. Finally, group work will promote collaboration amongst participants.

Process: (120 min)

Hook/Introduction: (10 min)

1. Who Votes & Why Does it Matter?

- *Secretly calculate how many students comprise 40% of the class that day.* Have everyone in

the class stand. Write on the board and then tell them that they represent **all eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 in Canada**.

- Now have 60% of the class sit down. The students left standing now represent those eligible voters, between ages 18 – 24 who actually voted in the 2011 federal elections (38.8% total, 36.9% of males aged 18 - 24, 40.9% of females aged 18 – 24).
- Ask the students who remain standing to draft the rules for a student dress code, locker assignment, cell phone use, or some other issue that relates to all students. An option would be to create in-class rules that could be enforced for a week. Students standing should discuss a few different options for rules on which they could vote.
- Have the students who remain standing vote on those options. If the rules allow, hold students to the results of that vote for the rest of the week because the voters voted on it and decided it was to be so.

2. Discuss:

- What was the purpose of this exercise?
- How did it feel to have 40% of the students discuss and pass rules that affect everyone?
- Is it fair for those few people to decide the issue for everyone?
- Do those people represent what everyone wants?
- How could the rest of the people have made a difference? (Answer: They could have voted!)
- Why should young people vote? Imagine the impact if all eligible people under age 24 organized and voted. It could turn an election upside-down!
- Brainstorm issues that are important to young people that could change everything.

3. Lead into next activity: Even if you're not yet old enough to vote, you can still make a difference. There are many ways for young people to participate as active citizens.

Graffiti Brainstorming Activity: (10 min)

1. Ask participants to think about what it means to be an active citizen. Students will brainstorm ideas of active citizenship, what it means to them and ways in which they can participate locally, nationally and globally in a meaningful way, identifying issues that are important to them and the community.

- Divide participants into 5 groups. Give each group a sheet of chart paper with one of the following five words written in the middle: school, community, province, country and world.
- Ask each group to brainstorm and write/draw what it means to participate as an active citizen in the context indicated on their sheet. Identify issues that are important to that context.
- Circulate the sheets OR the groups so each group can discuss and add new ideas to each sheet.

2. Discuss:

Looking at the ideas that have been articulated here, what realistically do you think you could do to address some of these issues today? How can you go about being an active citizen? What steps can you realistically take? Think about what you, as citizens, could do to effect the changes you wish to see.

- Here's how one student took positive action to change an issue that mattered to him. Show video about Helene Campbell who used Twitter to raise awareness of organ donation:

<http://youtu.be/l17lqge9-w0> (1:35 min)

- Similar to Helene Campbell, how can you take the ideas that you have brought forth and create a plan to raise awareness and interest, and effect change?

3. Setting the Scene

Imagine a new Mayor has been elected in your town. She's interested in supporting youth in taking action on issues that matter to them. She's invited a group of youth from each of the five high schools in town to attend a Town Hall meeting during which each group will present a proposal of an action plan for change. In democratic fashion, everyone at the Town Hall will then be invited to vote on the action plan that will receive the Mayor's funding and/or support to carry out the plan.

Each group from the previous exercise represents one high school and is assigned a letter from A – E (for voting purposes).

4. What Matters to You? (10 min)

1. **Say:** As a member of this high school, you are invited to share an issue that matters to you.
 - Give each participant a Post-It Note to jot down an issue that concerns him/her.
 - Invite participants to post their ideas on the board or a large working surface. Categorize the issues as they are being posted (i.e. group similar issues together). Identify the top four issues.
2. Instruct students to form 4 mini-groups (inside each high school) based on the issue that matters to them most (choosing from the top four issues identified above). If the mini-groups are uneven, ask for volunteers to switch groups.
 - Show the picture of the frog (below) and ask participants to share what they see.
 - Explain that different people can have different views about the same issue. In order to act responsibly on an issue, it's important to become informed about the topic and to consider the multiple perspectives that people might have on the issue.
 - Explain that we can ask questions to help us research a particular issue: Who does this issue impact or who might want to have a say (stake) in this issue? What different positions could we have on this topic? Why is it important to look at topics from different points of view before deciding on taking action? As active citizens, we need to research our topic thoroughly before deciding on what we want to put our time and effort into, and the best ways to do so.
3. Instruct each mini-group to: 1) identify and discuss the different perspectives on their issue, and 2) reach a consensus and prepare a one-minute argument about the issue from one of the perspectives. They will present this argument to the other members of their "school". As a school, they will vote on the issue that they would like to present at the Town Hall. Give each mini-group a sheet of chart paper and markers to jot down their ideas.
 - After all of the mini-groups have presented their issue, conduct a blind vote (heads down, hands up) to determine which of the four issues should be presented at the Town Hall.
 - Once an issue has been identified, invite each school to prepare an action plan for change to present at the Town Hall. They should prepare a **two to three minute** presentation about their action plan.

Creating an Action Plan: (40 min)

Remind students that it's important to get as many people as they can behind their action plan in order to create a bigger voice for their cause. They need to be convincing. Ask students to consider what other information they might need to strengthen their argument for their proposal (in relation to the multiple perspectives on the issue). With student input, identify and assign roles that each of the students can take on to prepare the proposal (action plan) for their school. Roles could included:

- Creators of a visual aid (create a visual that will capture the audience's attention – they could create more than one)
- Researchers (use computers/laptops in the room)
- Communicators (relay information from researchers to proposal writers)
- Presenters (come up with an engaging way to present their issue/proposal)
- Sign creators (prepare information signs to go above the voting boxes)
- Speech writers (liaise between proposal writers and presenters)
- Proposal Writers (fill out action plan sheet)

Town Hall & Vote: (30 min)

Gather the "school" groups for the General Assembly of the Town Hall.

1. Start the Town Hall by saying:
 "Welcome everyone to our Active Citizens meeting. We look forward to hearing the great proposals from each group. We ask that while each group is presenting their issue, the rest of us will listen attentively and respectfully. When we call your school/group letter (A to E), please come to the front of the room to address your topic to the audience. You will have a maximum of three (3) minutes to present and convince the audience. We will notify the presenters when they have one (1) minute remaining, as well as the last 15 seconds. This will be to ensure that each group has an equal amount of time to present."
2. Once all proposals have been presented say:
 "Now that you have heard all the proposals, we invite you to vote on which of these six courses of action you feel we should, as a group, put our effort into to create a change we would like to see in (the school, community, city, country, world, etc., depending on the ideas proposed). We now ask each group leader to lead their participants back to their respective work stations where you will have the chance to cast your vote."
3. Allow time to decide which issue each student should vote for. Set up one or more voting boxes so students can vote on the most convincing campaign. Begin the wrap-up discussion once all the students have voted. (Group leaders could share roles to count the votes and lead the debrief).

Wrap-Up Discussion: Debrief, reflection and closing remarks (20 mins)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Which issue did you vote for and why?
- 1) How important do you think it is to be an active citizen in a democratic society? Explain.
- 2) How did you feel about having the opportunity to vote?
- 3) How can you take what you did today and replicate it at school, in your community?
- 4) How could you go about doing this in your community and getting attention for it?
- 5) How do you see this as being part of the democratic and legislative process?
- 6) Do you understand that even if you cannot vote, you can get involved? If yes, how; if no, why?

