Teacher Resources for

TEACHING CIVIC LITERACY PROJECTS

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Grades 4–12

Shira Eve Epstein
Teacher Resource A—Community Walk Reflection Sheet

This past week, we walked on the blocks surrounding our school, observing and taking notes on social problems in our community. Use the space below to reflect on what you saw.

During our community walk, I was concerned to see . . .

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

I was surprised that . . .

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

I expected to see . . .

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

I think it is important for our class to do something about . . . (name no more than 2 issues)

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
Teacher Resource B—What’s Your Opinion?

You have shown interest in studying the topic of marriage equality. There is much public conversation about this topic. Judges in our courts and legislators in our government have weighed in, making important rulings about who can get married to whom.

In this activity, you will reflect on your own opinions on marriage. Next to each statement, circle Agree or Disagree. Underneath each statement, write a sentence explaining your reaction to the statement.

Marriage is between a man and a woman.  
Agree  Disagree
________________________________________________________________________________________  
________________________________________________________________________________________

The government should create policy that regulates marriage.  
Agree  Disagree
________________________________________________________________________________________  
________________________________________________________________________________________

All consenting adults have the right to get married.  
Agree  Disagree
________________________________________________________________________________________  
________________________________________________________________________________________

People get married so that they can have children.  
Agree  Disagree
________________________________________________________________________________________  
________________________________________________________________________________________

It is good for society when consenting adults get married.  
Agree  Disagree
________________________________________________________________________________________  
________________________________________________________________________________________
Teacher Resource C—Reading and Reflection on the Media

This week, you will research how your group’s chosen issue has been covered in the media. Over the course of the week, take the following steps:


2. In the search engine on each site, insert the search terms related to your chosen issue that your group determined.

3. When you find a related news article, print it and bring it to your desk.

4. As you read the article, underline sentences that you think are important and that will help you complete the chart below.

5. Fill in the following chart for each article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper and Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Quote from Article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Quote from Article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Purpose for Writing the Article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Words, Names, Terms (list at least 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Resource D—Moving Towards Action

You have spent many hours offering your services to individuals in need at different sites in our town. Some of you have worked in hospitals, some of you have worked in homeless shelters, and some of you in an early-childhood day care center. Answer the questions below so as to reflect on your experience and consider how the lives of the individuals you served may be improved.

1. What are the key needs of the individuals at your site? Name at least 2.

2. How have you helped the people at your site?

3. Think of at least 1 instance where you could not provide the help that you felt was needed by someone, or many people, at the site. Describe what happened.

4. Given what you described in No. 3, what would help this person or people? Would it help if the site had more funding from the government? Would it help if the staff had different training? Would it help if there were fewer people being serviced at this site? Would it help if anything else about the site was different? Would it help if the people’s experiences outside of the site (e.g., in their homes, streets, and schools) were different? You can respond to any of these questions or propose another suggestion.

5. Who do you think we should talk with to learn more about how to improve the lives of the people at your site?
**Teacher Resource E—Crafting a Persuasive Letter**

You have spent weeks studying gun control and believe that individuals should have limited access to guns. During the open forum last week, you decided to try to convince our city’s mayor to push for stricter gun-control measures for the state. Presently, the state has weak gun-control laws. You will communicate to him about this by writing him a persuasive letter. We will also try to set up a meeting with one of his staff members.

Use this organizer below to brainstorm ideas for your letter. The key argument has already been filled in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Individuals should have limited access to guns, and state legislation should be passed that ensures this.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons and Explanation of Argument</th>
<th>Make brief notes about 3 points that support your argument. Reference the ideas from our class readings:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criticism</th>
<th>Acknowledge at least 2 points that those against gun control might say to criticize your reasoning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Explain how you would respond to these criticisms:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This graphic organizer draws from the ideas presented in Felton, M. K., & Herko, S. (2004). From dialogue to two-sided argument: Scaffolding adolescents’ persuasive writing. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 47*(8), 672–683.
Teacher Resource F—Oral Presentation Peer-Assessment Form

You have been working in small groups to create an oral presentation on U.S. involvement in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria. This week, every small group in the class will present its oral presentation to another group. Use this worksheet to assess the presentation that you will watch.

**Concerns:** First, ask the presenting group what concerns and questions it has about its presentation and write them below.

1. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

**Assessment:** Second, while you are watching the group’s presentation, take notes on the following chart. Assuming you will not be able to finish the whole chart during the group’s presentation, take some time after the presentation to complete it. Keep in mind the concerns that the group members shared. You will later submit your notes to the group members and they will use your feedback to improve their work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Your feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students speak during the group presentation</td>
<td>Circle one: Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students speak clearly with good intonation, making eye contact with the audience</td>
<td>Circle one: Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explain what you like or what could be improved about the students’ speaking skills:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and media displays are used to enhance the presentation</td>
<td>Circle one: Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explain what you like or what could be improved about the visual and media displays:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students articulate one succinct, overarching opinion about the conflict</td>
<td>Circle one: Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write what the group’s opinion is:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Teacher Resource F—Oral Presentation Peer-Assessment Form (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Your feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The students make at least 3 substantive points that draw from our class readings and support the overarching message | Circle one: Yes / No  
Summarize the 3 points: |

| The students share at least 2 next steps that they believe the government should take in reference to the conflict | Circle one: Yes / No  
Summarize the 2 next steps: |

**Next Steps:** Third, review your feedback with the presenting group and ask the students to determine the next steps they will take to improve their work. Write the students’ proposed next steps below.

1. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community walk</td>
<td>Small-group and whole-class discussion—reflect on community walk and compose list of at least 10 community problems</td>
<td>Small-group and whole-class discussion—narrow list of 10 problems down to 2 or 3 that are most pressing</td>
<td>Independent reading—students choose 1 problem, of the 2 or 3 previously identified, and read teacher-selected articles on that problem</td>
<td>Prepare presentations—students work in small groups to prepare short presentations on the problem they studied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>Open forum—choose 1 central problem for the civic literacy project</td>
<td>Mini-lesson on conducting research on the internet; independent internet-based research—study the efforts of organizations and agencies focused on problem</td>
<td>Independent internet-based research—study the efforts of organizations and agencies focused on problem</td>
<td>Open forum—determine if students will join a pre-existing campaign or initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read poetry and/or narratives that document how individuals experience problem; independently annotate texts</td>
<td>Read poetry and/or narratives that document how individuals experience problem; independently annotate texts</td>
<td>Watch film that documents how individuals experience problem; small groups create and present posters on how individuals experience the problem</td>
<td>Prepare for community interviews where students will gather information on how community members experience problem</td>
<td>Rehearsal interviews with classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-class share-out—students share key information gathered during interviews</td>
<td>Small-group discussions—given the previous week of research, students determine what they want to say about their problem (i.e., they determine their message)</td>
<td>Deliberative forum—deliberate on 2–3 possible actions and choose action step (e.g., digital film PSA, persuasive letter, mural)</td>
<td>Study model action steps in the form the students chose (e.g., model PSAs)</td>
<td>Brainstorm and draft text for action step integrating elements from model texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue drafting text</td>
<td>Peer review; submit text to teacher for teacher review</td>
<td>Review from a community member</td>
<td>Revise and edit text according to feedback from peers, teacher, and community member; small-group workshops or mini-lessons to address areas of need</td>
<td>Revise and edit text according to feedback from peers, teachers, and community member; small-group workshops or mini-lessons to address areas of need (add multiple days as necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute texts/execute action (add multiple days as necessary)</td>
<td>Reflect on action in small-group discussions and as a whole class</td>
<td>Whole-class brainstorming to propose next steps for the class or for other citizens working on related campaigns</td>
<td>Reflect on action and next steps in writing; share excerpts of writing</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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