

Defining service—A Reflection Activity

- **Grade level:**
Middle School, High School
- **Subject areas:**
Social studies, science
- **Estimated duration:**
Preparation time: 20 minutes.
Activity: approximately 50-60 minutes. First Step (each student completes handout): 10-15 minutes; Second Step (group activity): 12-15 minutes; Third Step (discussion): 10-15 minutes; Fourth Step (conclusion): 10-15 minutes
- **Setting:** Classroom
- **Skills:** Reading for comprehension, decision-making, prioritizing, sorting, communicating in small and large groups

Summary

Students explore on their own and with peers the various definitions of service and the value of many types of service.

Objectives

Students will:

- Explore their views of service
- Broaden their thinking about service by learning from peers
- Discover that many types of service are valuable, and it may take a combination of efforts to bring about positive social change

Materials:

Attachment A Handout (copies for each student and additional copies for small group work)
Writing utensils

Activity

Step One:

Introduce the concept of service by asking students to name a few examples. Or, you may summarize types of service you know of—either in your community or around the world.

The types of services mentioned should be diverse...such as helping a community clean up after a hurricane, collecting and distributing winter coats to children in need, volunteering at a literacy center to help others learn to read, collecting money for the homeless. Examples of service projects may be found at Make a Difference Day's website, at <http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/>.

Prior to distributing it, explain the Attachment A worksheet, *How do you define service?* Give instructions on completing it. Hand out the worksheet, and allow the students 7-8 minutes to complete this step.

Step Two:

Divide the students into groups of three, and have them share their rankings with each other. Then ask them to complete the handout again, this time ranking the actions by group consensus. Allow 12-15 minutes.

Acknowledge that the students may not have had time to rank all actions, but that is okay for the purposes of this exercise.

Step Three:

Bring the groups back together for a discussion. Below are several possible discussion questions:

- What are your observations?
- What criteria did you use to rank the actions?
- What did you learn by talking with your group members? What perspectives did you have in common, and what were differences?
- Did you think any of the examples were not service? If so, why?

Next, as a large group, categorize the types of service. See Attachment B for a list of how the actions could be categorized.

- Is there one definition of service, or are there many?
- Is one type of action better than other types?

Step Four:

Again in small groups, ask students to take a few minutes to look at the categories of service. If a group's goal was to reduce use of household hazardous materials (HHM) in their community, what categories of action might help bring that about? Ask students to be prepared to explain their answers.

In 5-7 minutes, discuss the students' answers in a large group. Ask, "Which categories would help bring about the desired actions?" You may want to list each category and ask if anyone came up with a way each type of service could be used to help bring about change. Below are examples.

Activism/Advocacy: Educate the community about alternatives to hazardous wastes (one avenue for reaching citizens would be to set up and staff a booth at the county fair)

Direct Service: Volunteer to work at a community clean-up event where unwanted chemicals are collected and properly disposed of (such as oil-based paints, pesticides and other household products with labels marked "Caution" or "Warning")

or

Conduct a school fund-raiser to promote the use of alternative cleaners. One such fundraiser could be to sell spray bottles with recipes for making non-hazardous cleaners printed on them.

Lifestyle: Buy and use non-hazardous products, such as vinegar instead of bleach, or latex instead of oil-based paints

Charity/Philanthropy: Financially support a non-profit organization with a mission to reduce use of harmful chemicals

Religion/Spirituality: Serve on a committee at a religious institution to reduce or eliminate the use of chemicals by the institution

Citizenship: Write a letter to a congressional leader in support of laws that forbid the use of mercury thermometers in schools

Vocation/Call: Work for your state's department of natural resources as an environmental specialist, focusing on HHMs

Social Entrepreneurship: Conduct a school or business waste audit to determine what hazardous materials are being used and whether alternative products exist (Note: State and local resource people often are willing to help with such an initiative. Contact local solid waste authorities or the Department of Natural Resources at 515-281-5918.)

Conclude by acknowledging that it often takes many different types of action for social change to occur. Direct service is often seen as the most important, but it alone may not bring about change.

Attachment A

How do you define service?

How do you define service? Below are 17 different actions. Place a “1” next to the action that fits most closely with your definition of service. Place a “2” next to the action second closest to your philosophy of service. Rank the action step farthest from your own philosophy of service as a “17.”

- Open burning one-on-one educational campaign¹
- Biking to school daily
- Reducing waste at the holidays campaign
- Choosing professional work that makes a difference
- Use fewer toxic products campaign
- Promote freecycle (freecycle.org)²
- Oral history research and reporting³
- Conduct school waste audits
- Conduct business waste audits
- Letter-writing campaign, possibly about a local waste issue such as backyard burning
- Composting—set up compost operation, harvest compost and use in flower bed
- Monitor an illegal dump site
- Collecting money to donate to Chad Pregracke’s Living Lands and Waters⁴
- Coordinate a Community-wide TV-Free week
- Conduct an anti-car idling campaign
- Conduct a Used-but-Still-Useable School Supply Drive
- Community litter clean-up

¹ This campaign would be based on education through conversation, not education through publication and dissemination of brochures or other literature.

² Freecycle is an organization where people give away (and get) items for free.

³ Students interview elderly citizens about their memories and lifestyles, possibly helping them compile personal histories to give as gifts. Discuss what trends students found related to waste in the past and write a story for the local newspaper.

⁴ Living Lands and Waters is a non-profit organization that organizes river clean-ups.

Attachment B

Potential Ways to Categorize Service

Activism/Advocacy

- Conduct an open burning educational campaign
- Reducing waste at the holidays campaign
- Use fewer toxic products campaign
- Promote freecycle (freecycle.org)
- Conduct an anti-car idling campaign
- Coordinate a Community-wide TV-Free week

Direct Service

- Conduct a Used-but-Still-Useable School Supply Drive
- Composting—set up compost operation, harvest compost and use in flower bed
- Community litter clean-up

Lifestyle/Personal Gestures

- Biking to school daily
- Oral history research and reporting

Charity/Philanthropy

- Collecting money to donate to Chad Pregracke's Living Lands and Waters

Citizenship

- Letter-writing campaign, possibly about a local waste issue such as backyard burning
- Monitor an illegal dump site and report findings to local waste authorities and county supervisors

Vocation/Call

- Choosing professional work that makes a difference

Social Entrepreneurship

- Conduct school waste audits
- Conduct business waste audits