Project Citizen: Making Change to Improve your Community

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- Helps students in grades 3-12 understand public policy and the political process

- Provides the knowledge and skills required for effective citizenship participation

- Involves students in learning about and improving their communities

- Develops an understanding of the importance of citizenship participation and a commitment to lifelong active citizenship

- *Project Citizen* is a public-policy, process-based program to help students grades 3-12 learn about the political process and to develop a commitment to active citizenship

- Provides the knowledge and skills required for effective citizenship participation

- Involves students in learning about and improving their communities

- Develops an understanding of the importance of citizenship participation

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A study by the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas found that students who participated in *Project Citizen*:

- developed a greater understanding of the complexity of public policy
- learned important communication skills
- developed a commitment to active citizenship

Essential Questions

Civics, Government, and Human Rights:

- How do citizens, civic ideals, and government institutions interact to balance the needs of individuals and the common good?

- How have economic, political, and cultural decisions promoted or prevented the growth of personal freedom, individual responsibility, equality, and respect for human dignity?
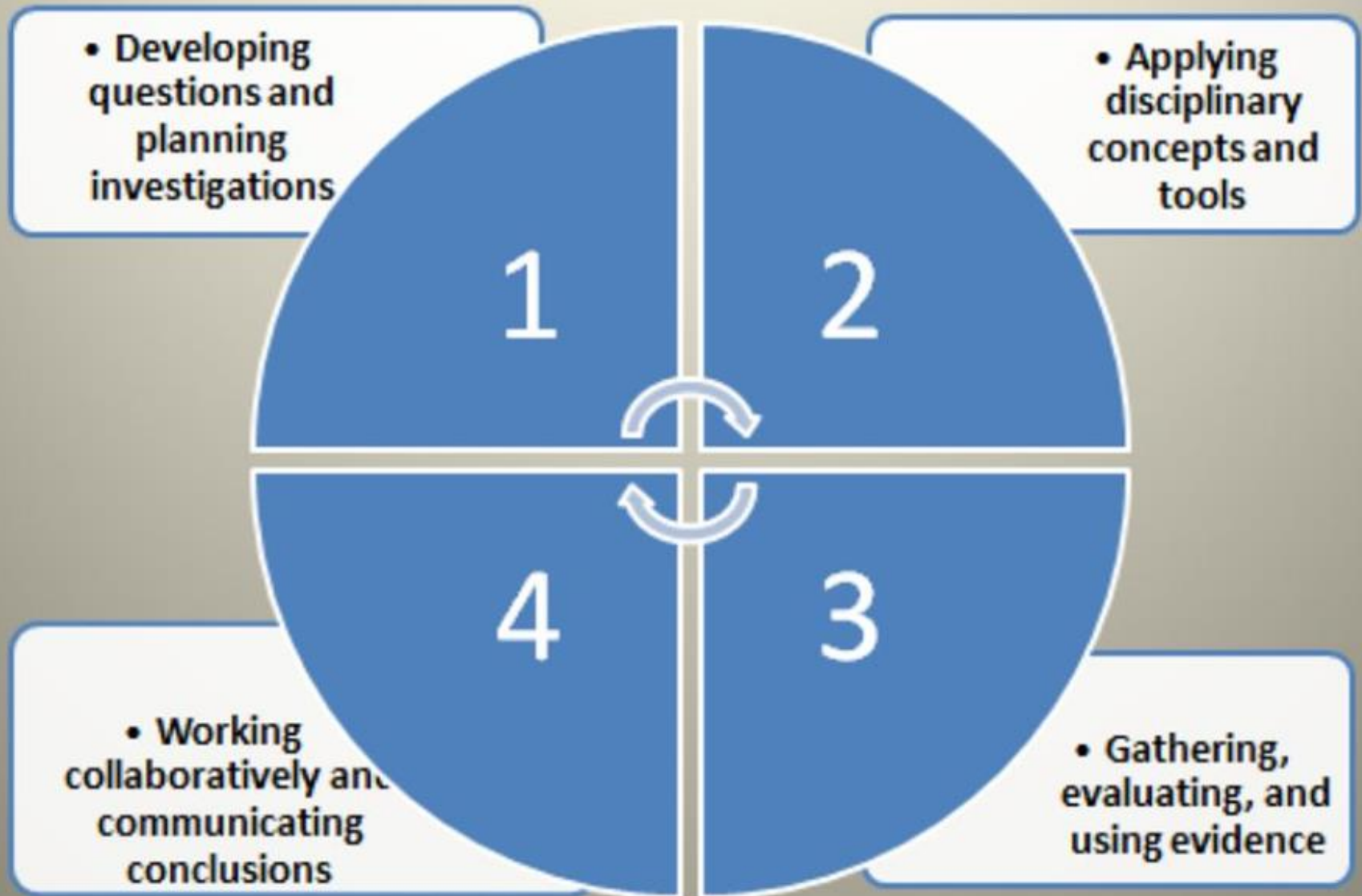
Project Citizen will help answer:

- Why is it important for citizens to work for the common good? What is the "common good"?

- What is the role of the citizen in the American system of republican democracy?

- What responsibilities does an individual have to society?

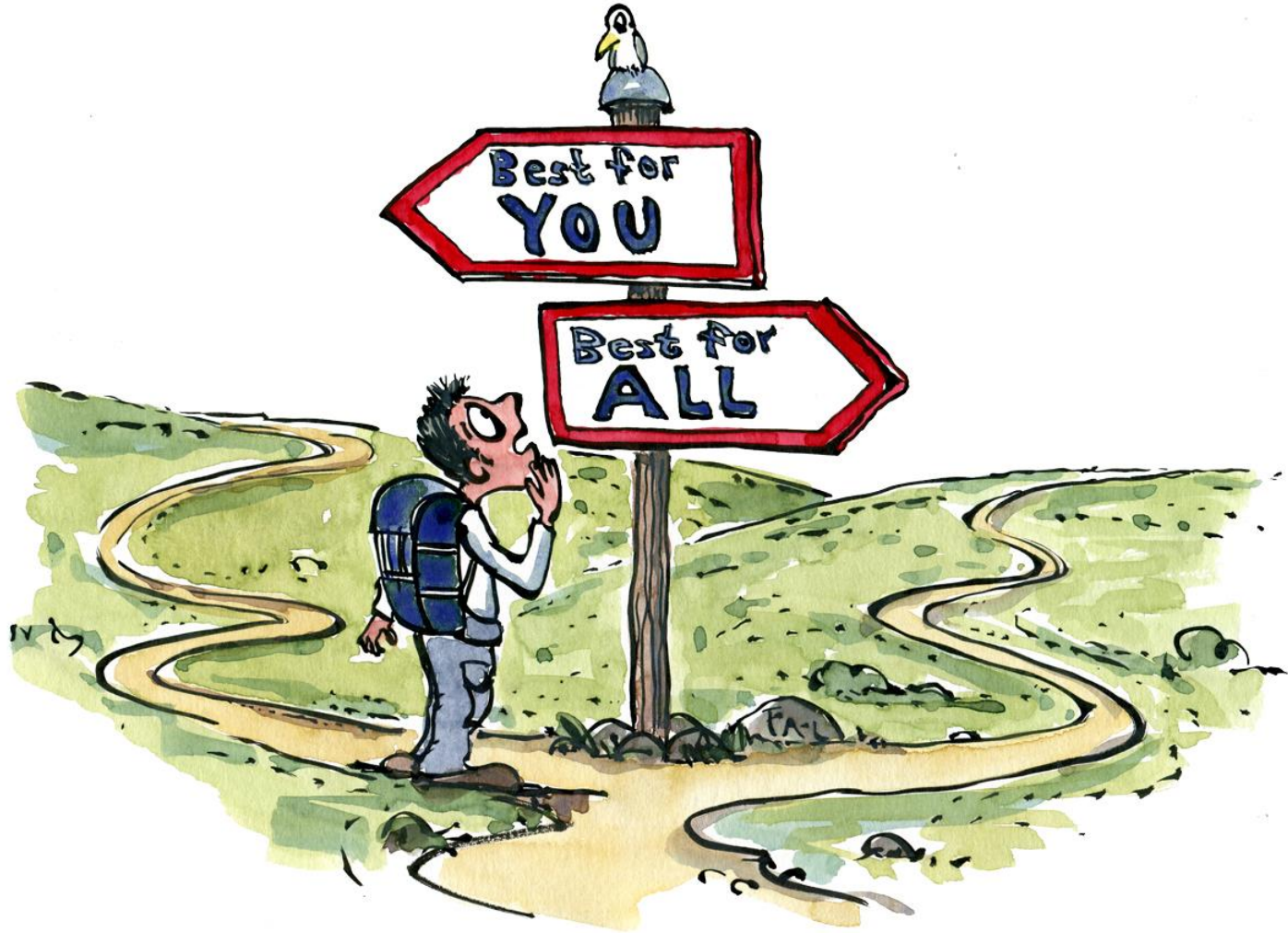- What is public policy and how can citizens influence it?

4 Dimensions

What is the common good?

Where do we find reference to the common good/general welfare?

Preamble, U.S. Constitution

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article I, sec. 8, U.S. Constitution

The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States

The common good

- The purpose of government is to make decisions for the common good—to improve our society--and protect individual rights

- How do we decide what is for the common good? In a democratic society, often we vote

- Our elected representatives are supposed to make and enforce laws for the benefit of all—the common good

- Democracy depends on ALL people—not just elected leaders—recognizing and supporting the common good

What is the role of the citizen?

- Does a good citizen have a responsibility to try to improve the lives of people who need help?

- Why is it important for citizens to work together for the common good?

- What are examples of people who have contributed to the common good?

- What are some ways citizens/you can participate in your government?
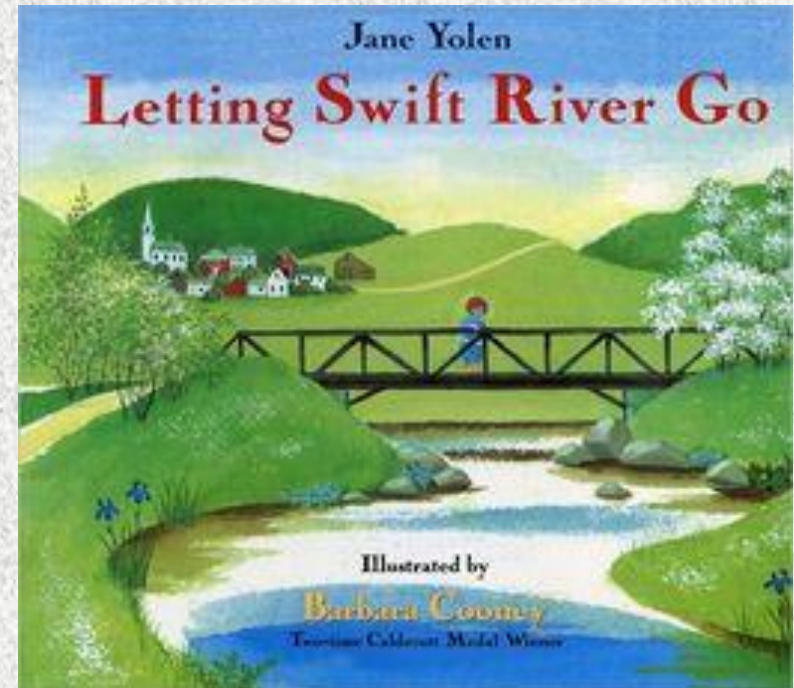
Additional Background:
iCivics: Citizen Me

- iCivics.org is a free website with civics based resources, lessons and games at https://www.icivics.org/

- The games and resources can provide some good background for Project Citizen, especially if you are not using a civics text

- One of the games is "Citizen Me" which you can use to create a citizenship pyramid evaluating citizenship on five levels (home, school, city, state and nation)
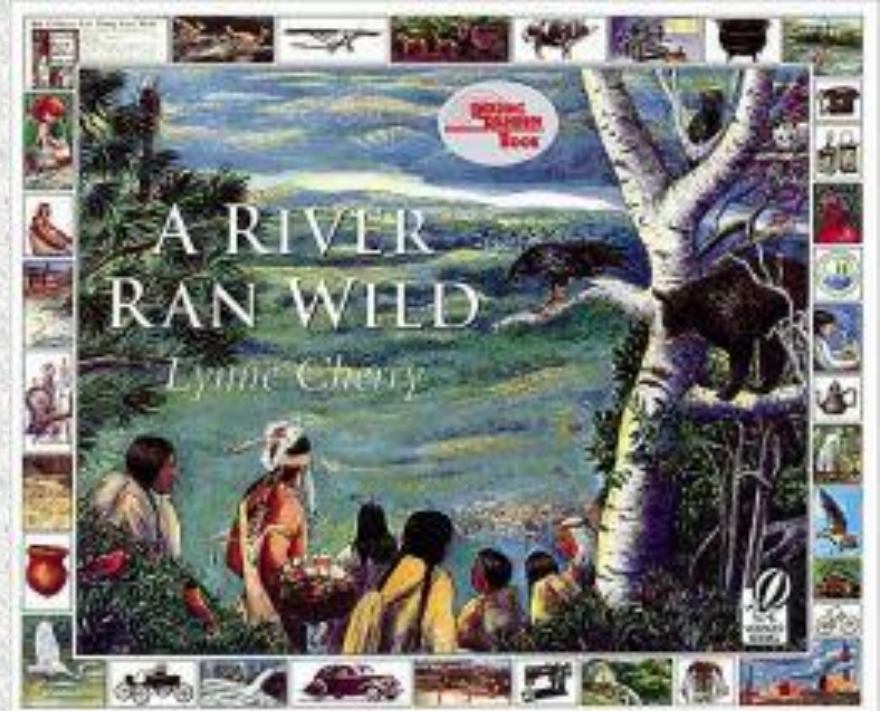
Children's Literature: *Letting Swift River Go* by Jane Yolen

Relates how local communities decided to let Swift River towns in western Massachusetts be flooded to form the Quabbin Reservoir to provide drinking water for Boston, and how this changed their rural communities.
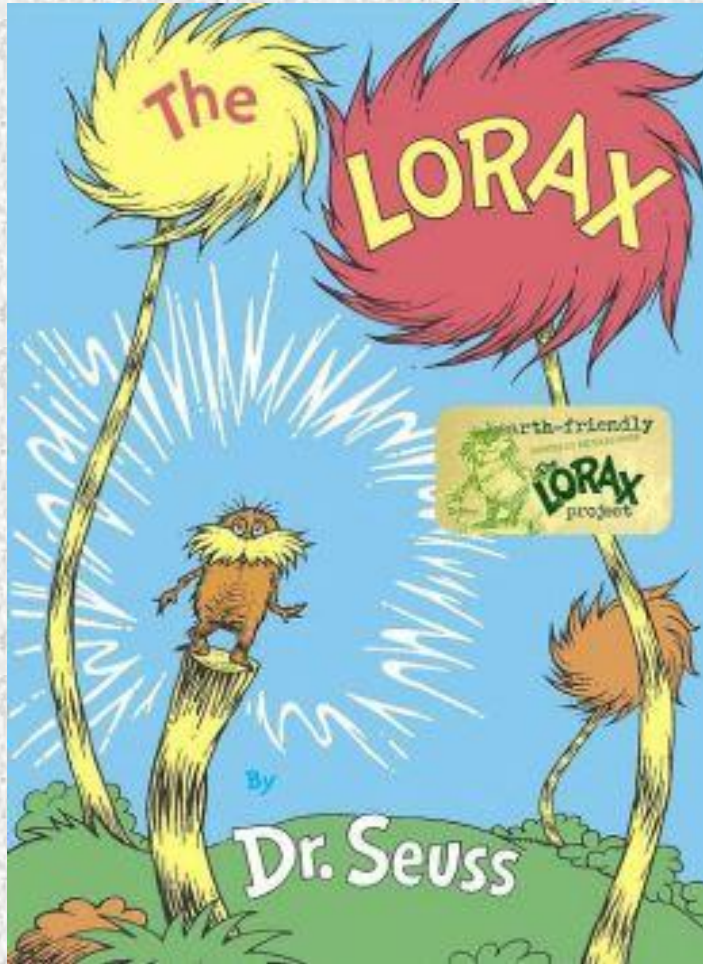
A River Ran Wild by Lynne Cherry

The story of how concerned citizens combated pollution and restored the beauty of the Nashua River in Massachusetts.

The Lorax by Dr. Seuss

A fable about the Onceler, who ruins the environment by cutting down the beautiful Truffula trees to make "thneeds," and the Lorax who speaks for the trees and calls upon a young boy who has visited him to do something.

Tocks Island Dam

New Jersey-based lessons

- Free online lessons focused on New Jersey history and government

- For upper elementary and secondary grades

- Provide background about NJ history and government

- Available at https://civiced.rutgers.edu/nj-lessons

- E.g.: "New Jersey Citizens Making Change: Improving Your Community"

Process for doing projects:

1. Understand public policy
2. Identify a problem in the community that requires a public policy solution
3. Gather and evaluate information on the problem
4. Examine and evaluate alternative solutions
5. Develop a proposed public policy to address the problem
6. Develop an action plan to get their policy adopted by government
7. Organize the materials into a portfolio to present to the appropriate governmental agency and to share at the annual State Project citizen Showcase
8. Reflect on the learning experience individually and as a class.

Step 1: What is Public Policy?

• The concept or idea that guides a course of action or procedure in dealing with public issues or problems.

• It includes the decisions, commitments and actions made by those who hold or affect government positions.

• Public policies are often embodied in laws, rules or regulations.

Why Learn About Public Policymaking?

- Ignorance about the public policymaking process leaves us without the tools to get things done.

- There is confusion about who does what in the policymaking arena.

- Knowledge, practical experience and citizenship skills empower citizens to influence public policy.

Sectors of society

- **Private sphere:** family and friends associate to pursue private interests free of unreasonable intrusion by the government

- **Civil society:** people associate to pursue interests they share and these associations monitor and influence government

- **Government:** formally elected or appointed representatives at local, state and national levels make decisions about public policy

Which sector of society? Private, civil society or government?

1. A local school board changes graduation requirements.
2. Susan becomes a member of the Girl Scouts.
3. Carmen and her friend go out to dinner and a movie.
4. Marco's family and friends have a picnic on July 4.
5. Sara and her sisters join the teachers' union.
6. The Sierra Club lobbies the New Jersey government to pass environmental protection laws.
7. The New Jersey state legislature passes a law limiting the use of cell phones while driving.
8. Citizens join a taxpayer's association in an effort to get government to lower property taxes in NJ.
9. The federal government awards a contract to a private company to repair sections of an interstate highway.
10. A city council passes a law establishing smoke free zones in public parks.

Public policies may be implemented by:

√Government alone

√Government acting cooperatively with civil society

√Government and civil society acting independently

√Civil society handling problems in accordance with government policy

Public Policies

The Problem: Poor families in the community need food and adequate clothing.

One solution: City officials fund a program for needy individuals to "buy" food and clothing from participating merchants using vouchers.

This is a public policy.

Another solution: A women's civic organization conducts a drive to collect food and clothing and then distributes it to needy individuals.

This is NOT a public policy.

What are the advantages of a public policy solution?

√ Civil society solutions depend on the voluntary efforts of individuals and may end

√ Public policy solutions continue until changed

Identify possible problems for class study

Students identify possible problems

Issues may range from local to global, such as:

- A school policy
- An unsafe street corner
- Teenage vaping
- Unemployment during the pandemic
- High costs of pharmaceuticals
- Income Inequality
- Environmental degradation
- Climate change

Select a problem to study

- Have your students gather some basic information about each problem

- For each problem, determine whether it is important and whether a solution is feasible

Is it important?

• You are bothered by something that is not being done right, needs to be changed, or deserves the attention of policy-makers.

• Are there others who also believe that the problem is an important one?

• Are important values or resources threatened?

• Who created this problem and, equally important, who can do something about it?

• **Consider four factors:** *scope*, *intensity, duration and resources*.

Is it important? Are human rights involved?

Our ideal of public education is one in which students are engaged in reflection and action that constantly encourages them to move America toward a "truer" democratic society, in which all people have enforceable, inalienable rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Art. 1—All human beings are free and equal

Art. 2—No distinction as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status

Art. 3—Right to life, liberty and personal security

Art. 4—Freedom from slavery

Art. 5—Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Art. 6—Right to recognition as person before the law

Art. 7—Right to equal protection of the law

Art. 8—Right to effective remedy by competent national tribunals

Art. 9—Freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile

Art. 10—Right to fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal

Art. 11—Right to be considered innocent until proven guilty

Art. 12—Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy

Art. 13—Freedom of movement

Art. 14—Right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution

Art. 15—Right to nationality

Art. 16—Right to marriage and family

Art. 17—Right to own property

Art. 18—Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Art. 19—Freedom of opinion and expression

Art. 20—Freedom of peaceful assembly and association

Art. 21—Right to take part in government

Art. 22—Right to social security

Art. 23—Right to work, free choice of employment, equal pay for equal work, join trade unions

Art. 24—Right to rest and leisure

Art. 25—Right to adequate standard of living for health and well-being of self and family

Art. 26—Right to education

Art. 27—Right to participate in cultural life of the community

Art. 28—Social and international order in which rights can be fully realized

Art. 29—Duties to the community

Human Rights

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_translations/eng.pdf

- Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not itself enforceable, international treaties protecting individuals and groups against human rights abuses are enforceable by requiring reparations.

- HRE USA offers a series of lesson and ideas about teaching human rights at https://hreusa.org/

Is it feasible?

- Is there enough information available?

- Is the problem narrow enough for students to be able to address it?

Is it important/feasible?

- Violence on school campuses

- Budget cuts in school funding

  Consider:
  - Scope?
  - Intensity?
  - Duration?
  - Resources at stake?
  - Human rights involved?
  - Information available?
  - Sufficiently narrow?

Select a problem to study

Step 4: Gather Information

- Identify sources of information
- Public policy makers and interest groups
- Telephone calls
- Interviews
- Letters
- Libraries, newspapers, websites

Federalism and Separation of Powers

	Executive	Legislative	Judicial
National Government	President	Congress: Senate and House of Representatives	• U.S. Supreme Court • Appellate Courts • Federal District Courts
State Government	Governor	State Legislature: Senate and Assembly	• NJ State Supreme Court • NJ Appellate Courts • NJ Superior Courts (by County)
County Government	County Executive President	County Board of Commissioners	No separate courts (see above)
Municipal Government	Mayor	Town council	Municipal courts (limited jurisdiction)
School Board	Superintendent	School Board	Administrative Office of the Courts—Commissioner of Education

Federalism and Separation of Powers

Problem	Air pollution	Gender Pay discrimination	Homeless	Gun control	Immigration
Level of Government	State and Federal	State and Federal	Local, state and federal	State and Federal	Federal
Agency	EPA DEP	State Legislature and Governor Congress and President			

Step 5: Organize the information: Identify and develop alternative solutions

Alternative Solutions

1. What are the causes and effects of the problem?

2. What alternative policies could solve the problem? What are pros and cons of each of them?

3. Which alternative policy would best solve the problem? Does it address the most important underlying cause of the problem? Does it alleviate some of the effects of the problem?

4. Does government have the responsibility and authority to address this issue/problem?

5. Which level (federalism) and agency of government (separation of powers) might have the responsibility and authority to address this issue/problem?

6. In looking at possible solutions, look at their pros and cons of each (may involve more research).

Select the best solution: What makes a Good Policy?

√ Does it have a legitimate purpose?

√ Is it fair?

√ Is it clear?

√ Is it flexible?

√ Can it be enforced?

√ Is it consistent with constitutionally guaranteed individual rights?
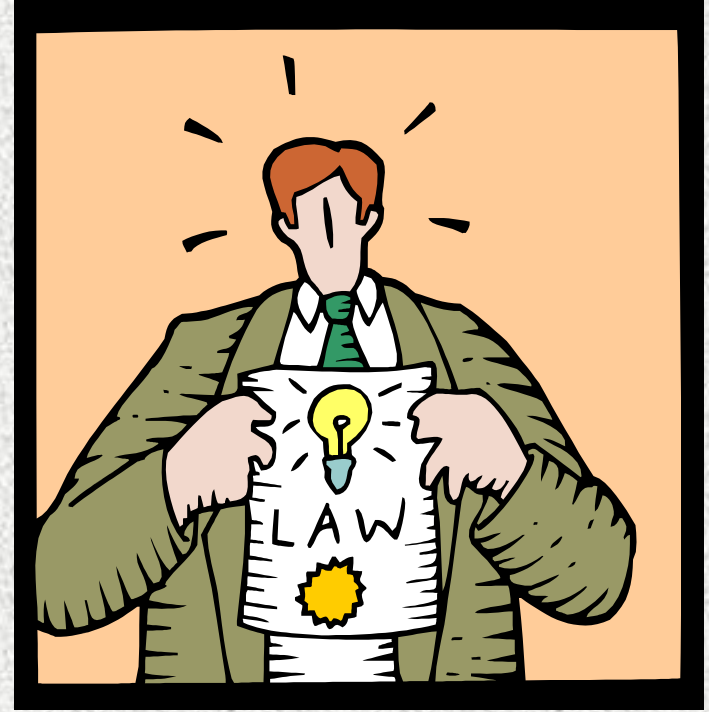
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Step 6: Develop an Action Plan

Develop an Action Plan

➢ Who (what groups) might support the public policy?

➢ Who might be opposed? Why?

➢ What could you do to ensure that the proposed policy is implemented?

➢ Who do you need to lobby?

➢ How can you convince those opposed that it is a good idea?

Step 7: Present the project to the appropriate agency

Four basic goals of the presentation:

- Inform the audience of the importance of the problem identified
- Explain and evaluate alternative policies so audience can understand
- Discuss why the class choice was the "best" policy and that it is constitutional
- Demonstrate how the class could develop support for the policy (the action plan)

Step 8: Reflect on the Learning Experience

1. What did I personally learn about public policy from working with my classmates?
2. What did we learn as a class about public policy by developing our portfolio?
3. What skills did I learn or improve upon by working on this project?
4. What skills did the class learn or improve upon by working on this project?
5. What are the advantages of working as a team?
6. What are the disadvantages of working as a team?
7. What contributions did I make as part of the team?
8. What did the team do well?
9. How can I improve my skills in collaboration, problem-solving, research, writing and public speaking?
10. How can the class improve its skills in collaboration, problem-solving, research, writing and public speaking?
11. What would we want to do differently if we were to develop another project aimed at influencing public policy?
12. What would we want to do differently if we were to develop another *Project Citizen* portfolio?
13. How did working on this project change my attitudes about personal responsibility for my community?
14. How did working together on this project change my attitudes about what a citizen or group of citizens can do /to improve their community?

Annual *Project Citizen* Showcase

Your digital class portfolio may be in the format of:

- A powerpoint
- A website
- A DVD
- Live Binders
- Any other type of computer-based presentation that does not require a huge amount of bytes since the portfolios need to be sent by email to the evaluators

- Digital portfolios should be sent to ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu by the first Friday in June each year.

PROJECT CITIZEN PORTFOLIO EVALUATION Rubrics

Use the rating scale below to evaluate the portfolio. Give only one whole numeric rating (1–10) for each of the five sections of the Criteria for Evaluation.

Excellent: 9–10   Above Average: 7–8   Average: 5–6   Below Average: 3–4   Insufficient: 1–2

PROJECT:_____ **Evaluator:** _____

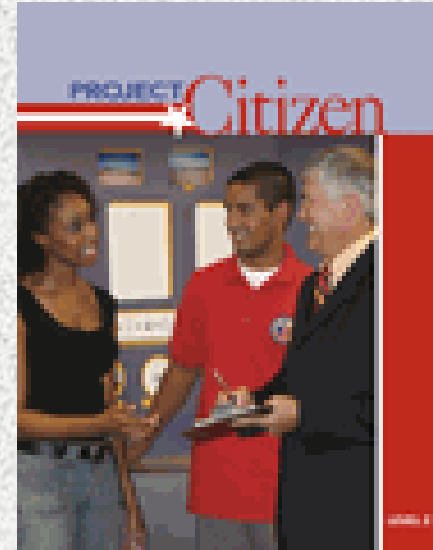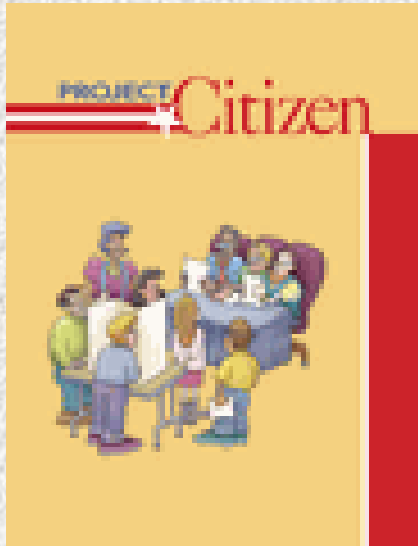| Criteria for Evaluation	Rating	Comments
Section 1: Understanding the Problem • States and explains the problem and its causes and presents evidence that there is a problem • Demonstrates an understanding of issue(s) involved in the problem • Demonstrates an understanding of existing or proposed public policies • Explains disagreements about the problem that may exist in the community • Explains why government should be involved in the solution		
Section 2: Analysis of Alternative Policies • Presents two or three alternative public policies to address the problem • Explains advantages and disadvantages of each alternative policy presented • Identifies controversies and conflicts that may need to be addressed for each alternative		
Section 3: Public Policy Development and Persuasiveness • States a public policy that addresses the problem and identifies the government branch or agency responsible for enacting their proposed public policy • Supports their proposed public policy with reasoning and evidence • Identifies and explains advantages and disadvantages of their proposed public policy • Explains and supports why their proposed public policy is constitutional		
Section 4: Implementation of an Action Plan • Identifies individuals and groups, both supporters and opponents, who will need to be influenced • Identifies government officials, both supporters and opponents, who will need to be influenced • Outlines and explains an action process for getting their proposed public policy enacted • Proposes action that builds and expands on evidence presented in previous panels		
Overall Portfolio: Extent to which the complete portfolio does the following: • Presents material in the display and binder that correlate to and support each other • Constructs a clear and convincing sequence from one panel/section to the next • Uses and documents research from multiple sources and provides appropriate notation for the sources and research evidence used • Follows standards of good writing • Uses relevant and appropriate graphics and written information • Is visually appealing • Includes evidence of student reflection that states what students		

http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid61630332400 1?bctid=671097321001

Please go to our website at:

https://civiced.rutgers.edu/programs/project-citizen

to see some student projects

Project Citizen materials are available:

- For middle school (yellow) and high school (blue) classes
- From the Center for Civic Education
- https://store.civiced.org/projectcitizen.html

- ***Project Citizen*** lends itself to inquiry-based learning, on-line student work as well as interdisciplinary work

- It takes a minimum of 6 weeks, or one day a week over 3-4 months, to do a project

- If you have any questions, contact Arlene Gardner at arlenega@sas.rutgers.edu or Robert O'Dell at ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu