

University of Virginia Center for Politics



Democracy Corps Lesson Plan 4: Contemporary Issues in the News-Part One

Purpose: This lesson is a part of YLI's Democracy Corps service learning program. Students build civic knowledge as they review local and state issues, brainstorm solutions to these problems and identify community issues of personal interest.

Materials:

- Multiple copies of your local newspaper
- Student Guide 1: Contemporary Issues in the News - Part One
- Chalk or dry board and markers

Central Questions:

What issues are currently impacting my community?

What issues are currently impacting my state?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up - Complete a "Think, Pair, Share" activity to help students identify issues that are important in their community. Follow the steps outlined below.
 - Think of 3-4 issues that are important locally or identify current statewide and national issues that have local implications.
 - Pair with a partner and compile a list of the issues you have identified.
 - Share your answers with the class.
2. Distribute Student Guide 1: Contemporary Issues in the News-Part One along with local newspapers. Instruct students to look through several newspapers and complete Step 1. Allow approximately 20 minutes to complete.
3. After students finish Step 1, separate them into groups of 4-5 in order to analyze data. (Space between teams is helpful to accommodate lively discussions.)
4. Once divided, ask students to sort their topics into categories and tally the number of stories for each. If needed, provide examples of topic categories such as:
 - education
 - crime
 - social problems
 - economy
 - health and safety
 - environment

legal and political issues, etc.

Groups may decide placement for complex issues such as "Local Schools Suffer Due to Budget Crisis." Students determine if this is an education topic or one related to the economy.

5. Upon completion of small group assignment, ask teams to share their categories and total number of articles identified for each. Collect the data, screen for duplicates and create a class tally on the board.

Tip: Save the list generated above to use again in Lesson Plan 5.

6. Discuss responses to the following questions.

- According to the local newspaper, what is the most important issue or problem in your community
- Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
- What is the least important problem in our area? Why?
- How can this information help you choose an issue to address in your community?
- Are there any issues missing from this list?

Differentiation

1. Students may monitor one issue for several weeks in local newspapers and broadcasts to see how it evolves over time.
2. Based on student skill level, teachers may limit the number of articles required in Step 1 to 5.



Lesson Plan 4
Student Guide 1

Contemporary Issues in the News-Part One

Step One

Review a sampling of local newspapers in order to identify current issues that are important in your community.

Select at least ten articles and answer the questions listed below for each one a separate sheet of paper.

Profile of Newspaper Articles

- Name of the newspaper where article is found.
- What is the title of the article selected?
- In which section of the newspaper does the article appear?
- What is the issue reported?
- Is a solution given? What is it?
- If no solution is given, can you recommend one? Are there other groups, government or non-profit, that are working to solve the problem?

Example:

1. Ban on NRA T-Shirts in Area Schools
2. Front Section
3. Freedom of Speech, Gun Control, Censorship
4. No solution is given. The article says students cannot wear T-shirts with guns and weapons.
5. I think students should be involved in writing school dress codes.

Step Two

Divide into small groups and review headlines collected from Step 1.

Sort by topic and tally the number of stories for each. Topics may include education, crime and justice, health care, environment and families. (Groups will need to decide placement for complex topics such as “Local Schools Suffer Due to Budget Crisis” that can fall under education or economy.)



Lesson Plan 4
Student Guide 1

Contemporary Issues in the News-Part One (Continued)

Deliberate

As a class, tally the results for each category and then answer the following questions.

1. According to the local print media, what is the most important issue or problem in your community?

2. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

3. What is an issue of minor importance in your community area? Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. How can this information help you choose an issue to address in your community?

5. Are there any issues missing from the list?
