



## Lesson: Identifying Community Issues

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will brainstorm community issues using multiple resources (their observations, interviews with others, and local media) and vote to narrow the list down to their top two choices. For next steps, you can 1) use an additional GC lesson on consensus building for the students to choose their issue from those top two or 2) facilitate student debate and discussion for the class to choose one of these 2 issues to address through civic action.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will have...

- Prioritized a list of community issues according to information gathered from multiple sources, including observations, interviews, and local media outlets (newspapers, blogs, radio)
- Engaged in debate about the strengths and drawbacks of focusing on the various community issues

### AGENDA

- Do Now: My Community Wheel: Defining Community (5 minutes)
- Identifying Community Issues (15 minutes)
- Advocating for Community Issues (20 minutes)
- Wrapping Up (5 minutes)

### MATERIALS

- Student handouts
- Poster paper
- Computer or printed media (newspapers, bulletins) for local issue research
- Markers

### PREPARATION BEFORE CLASS

- Please note: prior to this class period, students should have completed community interviews (provide them with Student Handout # 1) of at least three community members to get a broader sense of important local public issues. Emphasize that they're seeking to get a better sense of what's important for people in their local community – the school, neighborhood, city, or potentially state. National issues might be top of mind, but the class will be digging into a local topic. Students should come with their notes from these completed interviews to class today.
- Title poster papers:
  - TITLE: Observations / QUESTIONS: What issues have you encountered in your school, neighborhood, city, or state that you would like to address? (2 pieces)
  - TITLE: Interviews / QUESTIONS: What school, neighborhood, city, or state issues are important to your family, friends, and neighbors? (2 pieces)
  - TITLE: Media / QUESTIONS: What school, neighborhood, city, or state issues are in the news right now? (2 pieces)
- Gather a diverse range of local media resources (current newspapers, links to neighborhood blogs, school bulletins, local online magazines).
- Assign groups (3-6 groups, with 3-5 people per group)
- Prepare your own Community Map, to offer an example during the Do Now

### REFERENCES

N/A



## GETTING STARTED (5 Minutes)

### Do Now: My Community Wheel: Defining Community (5 Minutes)

Provide students with Handout # 2 and tell them to follow the directions on the handout to explore the communities they are a part of.

**Debrief:** Start by offering the following GC definition of Community -

A group of people with a common characteristic (place, interest, history, etc.)

*Your community might be the neighborhood you live in, the school you attend, or your circle of friends.*

Invite students to call on one another (share and then call on a student of their choosing to go next) to share examples of the communities they feel most connected to. If time, ask students to share reasons they believe people might feel more connected to some communities compared with others.

**Framing:** Explain that in this class, we'll be working to affect change on one of these communities. We will focus on **local change** (on a school, neighborhood, city or state level – notice these are in bold in the Community Wheel), not nationally. We do this because it is much easier for us to be a part of decision-making when we focus in on impacting the local community, rather than trying to get the attention of the national government. Ask students to brainstorm why that might be the case. Make the case, however, that the skills they practice in interacting with their classroom community are going to be very applicable to communities of many different sizes and scales.

Review the day's agenda.

## DURING CLASS (40 Minutes)

### Identifying Community Issues (20 minutes)

Frame the next activity by explaining that students will spend today's lesson brainstorming all of the issues in their community that they might address and then narrowing these down to the ones they are most interested in working on as a class. To do so, they'll be tapping into three main resources to identify community issues: their personal experiences (OBSERVATIONS), the interviews they conducted for homework (INTERVIEWS), and local journalism or media (MEDIA). Define media.

Divide the class into 3 or 6 groups, with 3-5 people per group. Explain that each group will utilize one resource to investigate issues at a time (point to posters labeled: Observations, Interviews, and Media) to brainstorm community issues focused on their school community, neighborhood community, city community (or state community, if appropriate), using their resources. (In the Media station, student should use local media to scan headlines and articles about what other people are thinking or talking about. If students did not conduct interviews, at the "Interview" station, they should put themselves in the shoes of a family member or friend and brainstorm issues from their perspective.)

Offer each group a different color marker. The groups will have 5 minutes to write down as many ideas they have that came from that particular source, at least three ideas per paper. Write down ideas directly on paper.

After groups have brainstormed issues using each resource, they should rotate around the room to read the ideas on every board. Their group has 2 minutes to add any new ideas they have for that source and also put a check mark next to the 2 ideas that they are most

**TIP:** Alongside the directions, show your own Community Map on the board to offer students an example.

**TIP:** As students are working on their Do Nows, circulate to check that students' conducted the interviews assigned as homework in the previous lesson.

### GLOSSARY TERMS:

**Community:** A group of people with a common characteristic (place, interest, history, etc.)

**Sample Sentence:**  
Your community might be the neighborhood you live in, the school you attend, or your circle of friends.

### GLOSSARY TERM:

**Media:** Means of mass communication, especially television, radio, newspapers, and the internet

**Sample Sentence:**  
The media loves talking about Donald Trump.

### SHORTENING THIS LESSON:

If students have not completed their homework or there is no access to media sources, consider having only two groups (Observations and Interviews; Observations and Media). If there are



interested in on that board. [At each new station, the group should pass the marker to a different group member.](#)

Groups should then return to their original boards and add 2 check marks next to the community issues they like the most on their original board. Then each group will read out the top 2 or 3 issues which received the most checkmarks, to be compiled by the teacher into one list at the front of the room. Provide Student Handout # 3 for students to record their notes on these leading issues.

Explain that they will now debate 4 of these issues to determine which 2 are most important to the class. Lead the class in a blind vote to narrow the list to their final 4 issues that will be up for debate.

### Advocating for Community Issues (25 minutes)

Give students Handout # 4 titled “Advocating for Community Issues.” Explain that the class is going to take part in a debate to narrow their issues from 4 to 2.

Ask students what they believe makes an effective debate. Write their ideas on the board.

Suggestions:

- Provide evidence to back up ideas
- Plan out your ideas before sharing
- Speak loudly and clearly
- Consider arguments other may have against your idea and address these

Split students up into 4 groups, each standing at one corner of the room. Assign each corner 1 of the topics. Note to the students that they may not have been assigned their favorite topic but that there is value in all of these topics and you need to explore them in depth today. Regardless of what topic they’re advocating for, they can vote for whichever topics they wish at the end of the period.

Ask each group to develop an argument for the debate that includes the following things:

- **Personal Stories** – What experiences tell you this issue is important to address?
- **Facts and Figures** - What background information do you know about this issue that makes it a pressing issue to address?
- **Counter Arguments** - Are there any arguments you think other people would make against working on your issue? How would you address these arguments?

Students can use the sentence starters found on Student Handout # 4 to help formulate their arguments. Clarify for students that their debate should focus on whether or not to work on this issue. Write on the board: Why is your issue the best choice for our class advocacy project?

This is a timed activity! Make sure students feel urgency and use time effectively. Groups will have the following time for each part of the process on Student Handout # 4.

**2 Minutes** – Huddle and plan your main ideas using the Advocating for Community Issues planner

**1 Minute** – Share your arguments to the class

**30 Seconds** – Other groups share their counter arguments/concerns about issue

**1 Minute** – Share your arguments to address counter arguments/concerns

**Repeat for each group.**

only Observations, still have the groups and have them make lists on just observations on each piece of poster-board.

**Tip:** Students can think big here - even big issues can be broken down into smaller and locally-specific root causes and goals. However, keep driving them back to issues that affect THEIR communities and not other communities (ex: integration of refugees into our town vs. the refugee crisis in Europe)

**Tip!** If your classroom is too crowded for walking, consider keeping students seated and rotating the papers among groups.

**Tip:** If you have a longer class period and more time for this, consider allowing for more time during each aspect of the debate.



One member of the group should record all their ideas. Two members of the group will be elected to share out these ideas.

Be strict on timing to create a sense of urgency and promote the succinct presentation of ideas (Use a timer up on the board or on your phone).

### **WRAPPING UP (5 minutes)**

Before asking students to return to their seats and thus shift their attention, congratulate them on their debate. Shout out a student for demonstrating respectful behavior during the debate. Ask students what they did well during the debate and what they could improve on.

Explain that next the class will be working together to decide on which of these final issues they'll address. Offer students encouragement in knowing that regardless of which issue they address, they'll be learning and practicing the skills for them to take to their campaigns to address any of these issues in the future.

### **Exit Ticket**

The Exit Ticket today is a chance for students to vote on which 2 issues of the remaining 4 they are most interested in working on. On a separate sheet of paper, students should respond to the following prompt.

- Write down the top two issues you want the class to work on. Results will be revealed at the start of the next class.
- If there is an issue that you personally feel you absolutely could not work on, please write an explanation so that your facilitator can follow up with you individually.



### Student Handout # 1: Exploring Community Issues Interview Template

*Talk to people to figure out their perspective on what could be improved in your local (school, neighborhood, city, or perhaps state) community! Interview at least three people with different levels of familiarity to you and different ages, jobs, family situations, and roles in your community.*

**EXAMPLE:** Name Carolyn Merriweather Description Works at library, fifties, mother of college kids

What issues do you think are the most pressing to solve in our community? *Curfew rules, public transit dependability*

Why? *People are trying to get to jobs and school, can't do so without reliable transit and a good night's sleep. Schedules have been getting worse recently.*

Do you know if there's any work being done to address these issues?

*There was a community meeting a few weeks ago held at the church. Organized by the District 9 Council.*

#### PERSON 1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Description \_\_\_\_\_

What issues do you think are the most pressing to solve in our local community?

Why?

Do you know if there's any work being done to address these issues?

#### PERSON 2

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Description \_\_\_\_\_

What issues do you think are the most pressing to solve in our local community?

Why?

Do you know if there's any work being done to address these issues?



**PERSON 3**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Description \_\_\_\_\_

What issues do you think are the most pressing to solve in our local community?

Why?

Do you know if there's any work being done to address these issues?

**PERSON 4 (Optional)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Description \_\_\_\_\_

What issues do you think are the most pressing to solve in our local community?

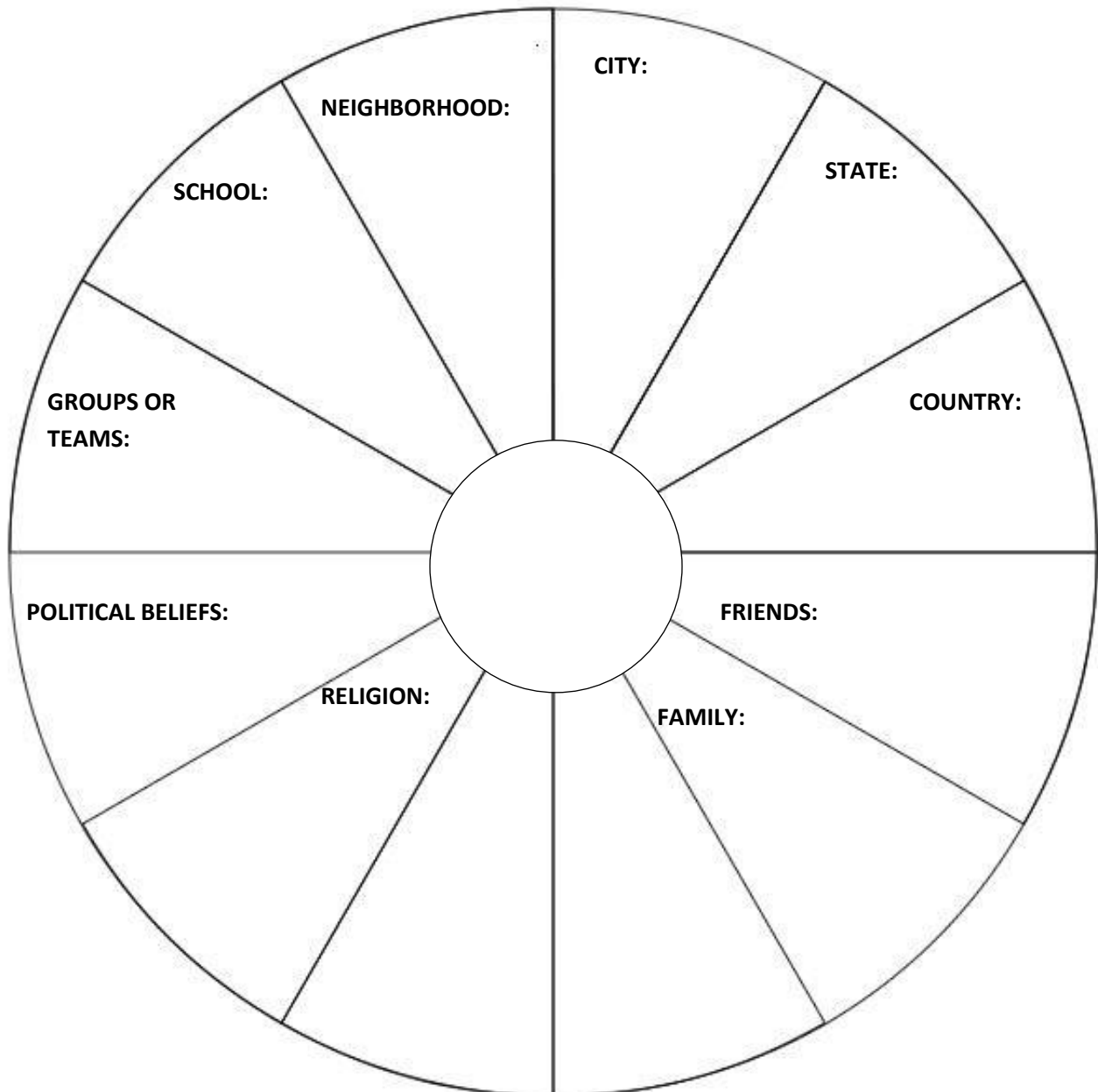
Why?

Do you know if there's any work being done to address these issues?

## Student Handout # 2: My Community Wheel

The Community Wheel below outlines different categories of communities you may be a part of.

1. Fill in your name at the center of the wheel
2. Write in the specific communities you are a part of within each category (example: for Family you might write Mother, Father and One Sister)
3. In the blank triangles of the wheel, add in any communities you are a part of that are not listed
4. Shade in the communities that you feel MOST connected to

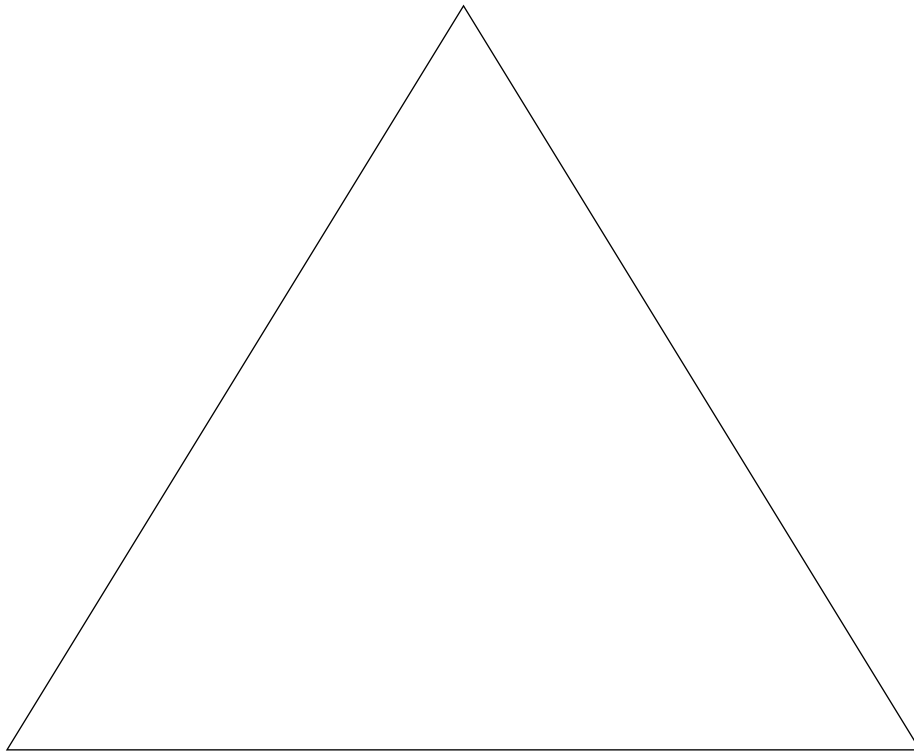




### Student Handout # 3: Researching Community Issues

#### Observations

*What issues have you encountered in your school, neighborhood, city, or state that you would like to address?*



#### Interviews

*What school, neighborhood, city, or state issues are important to your family, friends, and neighbors?*

#### Media

*What school, neighborhood, city, or state issues are in the news right now?*





## Student Handout # 4: Advocating for Community Issues

*Advocate for an issue! Brainstorm arguments in support of addressing your issue below.*

### Personal Stories

What experiences tells you that this issue is important to address?

### Facts and Figures

What background information do you know about this issue that makes it a pressing issue to address?

### Counter Arguments

Are there any counterarguments you expect the other groups to pose about your issue? How would you address these arguments?

*Use the following sentence stems below to help present your arguments.*

- I think we should focus on \_\_\_\_ because...
- Our group has seen this issue play our in our lives when...
- Some facts and figures which suggest this issue is an important one are...
- Other people might suggest that this isn't a smart issue to address because..., but...
- We could learn a lot from working on the issue of \_\_\_\_\_, like...

*When following up with other groups, make sure your peers' voices are heard!*

- I can see your point, but wonder...
- \_\_\_\_\_ might pose a challenge to working on this issue.
- How would you address \_\_\_\_\_ if we worked on this issue?