

Constitution Day Service-Learning Project Ideas for California

Provided to the Campaign by the Alameda County Office of Education.

Special thanks to Avi Black, History-Social Science Coordinator for Alameda County Office of Education and Joanna Sapir, Humanities Teacher at Lighthouse Community Charter High School for putting this resource together.

Introduction to this Resource

Service learning is distinguished from general "community service"-type activities in that it incorporates specific learning objectives. Service learning thus advances standards-based teaching by imbedding content connected to the standards within activities or projects. It is in the debriefing of and reflection on the activity that the real learning takes place, through relating service experiences to academic context.

The "service" aspect of service learning also distinguishes it from the more general category of project-based instruction. Service learning activities and projects have an audience, perhaps even a group of "beneficiaries", to whom their efforts and/or products are targeted.

The examples in the chart below are arranged to highlight both their "service" and "learning" aspects, by identifying both potential target audiences/beneficiaries and the specific standards from their content is drawn or to which that content can be connected. The examples all draw upon content standards that explicitly address the Constitution, and are therefore excellent possibilities from which to choose for Constitution Day activities.

Some of the activities included in the chart are short enough to be completed in one class period or during a school assembly on Constitution Day. You could also think about launching a longer-term project, which, like studying the Constitution, should be rich in learning opportunities.

We encourage you to think of other ways to match the project type, audience and content in order to create engaging and meaningful service learning experiences for your students -- and, to send ideas to us so that we can add them to the list and share them with others.

Note also the links we have identified to websites associated with existing projects. The sites will provide you with specific, detailed descriptions of methodology for introducing these approaches to students.

Service Learning and Civic Education

Many of these suggested service-learning activities make assumptions about what it means to be a good citizen and to exercise one's rights. As you develop a service-learning project with your students, be sure to make these assumptions explicit. For example, as these projects outline their learning goals, do they portray good citizens as people who do what they are told, participate when needed, critique injustice and inequity, or some combination of these? And as you explain to students why you are all engaging in service, be explicit about what their service means in terms of being a citizen. Is their service "enough?" What are the responsibilities of citizens concerned about the issues they are addressing in their service? One of the dangers of service learning is that students can think that if they volunteer once, they have somehow fulfilled their civic responsibilities or that being civically engaged does not require political engagement. Finally, if you are engaging in a service-learning project for Constitution Day, reflect on the connection to the Constitution. For example, oral history projects are a great example of service learning, but how do they connect to the Constitution? Are students interviewing people to find out a range of opinions on a current or historical Constitutional dispute? Are they learning firsthand about how people's lives have been affected by a piece of legislation or a Supreme Court decision? These links can connect service to a deeper understanding of the Constitution. *Thank you to David Donahue, Associate Professor at Mills College, for providing this forward to the resource chart.*

Project Type	Resources	Examples	Service Beneficiaries
<p>Voter Registration Drive <i>Get out the vote! Register new voters in your community in a one day project or a longer campaign.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitutional Rights Foundation's "Civic Action Guide" provides details for how to carry out this project. (Project #1) • For a list of voter registration campaigns and resources, go to http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/resources/policyinfo/VoterRegistrationCampaigns.htm 	<p>Read about a voter registration drive led by Mississippi middle school students on the Constitutional Rights Foundation's Service Learning Network: http://www.crf-usa.org/network/net7_4.html</p> <p>Read about San Francisco State's activities surrounding the election, which were the result of a broad coalition of efforts from faculty, students and the administration. Voter registration activities were highly organized and began well in advance of the election. http://www.cacampuscompact.org/cacc_programs/new_voters_project/sfsu.html</p>	<p>Community, Government</p>
<p>Community Education <i>What issues – local, national, or global – are important to your students and community? Choose one of the following methods for educating the public about a chosen issue.</i></p> <p>1. Community Forum <i>Invite community leaders and residents to discuss a chosen issue.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitutional Rights Foundation's "Civic Action Guide" provides details for organizing a community forum. (Project #2) • The two websites that follow offer tips and tools to organize your own community forum. 	<p>The upcoming elections provide a need for Community Education. Consider the following project ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite parents and community members to a large-screen broadcast of a televised debate between candidates, then provide facilitated discussion following the broadcast. 	<p>Community, Government, Peers/School</p>

<p>2. Teach-In <i>Invite experts to publicly present and discuss multiple perspectives of a chosen issue.</i></p> <p>3. Presentation to Local Government <i>Students present findings and recommendations on a chosen issue to a local city council or school board.</i></p> <p>4. Letters to the Editor/Op-Ed Pieces <i>Students write letters to local and/or national newspapers explaining their opinions on a chosen issue and recommending action.</i></p> <p>5. Educational Pamphlet <i>Students produce informational handouts on a chosen issue for their peers or local community. Or, students might translate existing literature to languages commonly spoken in their communities.</i></p> <p>6. Civics Fair <i>Students create exhibits to be displayed as part of a larger Civics Fair. The Fair can be organized across a department, school district, city, or county.</i></p> <p>7. Information Table <i>Students set up an informational table in a school courtyard or at frequented areas in the community.</i></p> <p>8. Poster Series <i>Students create a series of posters educating viewers about a particular topic. The posters are displayed throughout the school and/or larger community.</i></p> <p>9. Theatrical Production <i>For example, students could perform a re-enactment of the creation of the Constitution.</i></p>	<p>http://www.results.org/website/article.asp?id=1794 http://www.getthefactsny.org/organize/forum.html</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This “how-to” guide from Global Exchange provides tips and strategies for organizing an effective teach-in: http://www.circleoflifefoundation.org/education/sustainable/things/organize_teachin.pdf • The Media Awareness Network offers a Tipsheet for students on how to write letters to the editor http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/special_initiatives/toolkit_resources/tipsheets/writing_letter_editor.cfm • Student Voices has curriculum that includes organizing a Civics Fair. To view the curriculum, go to http://student-voices.org/teachers/curriculum/index.php?SiteID=1000 • This link provides a lesson plan for an issue-oriented poster campaign for third and fourth graders, but the basics can easily be applied to any grade level or issue http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/afterschool/activities/health/asthma.html 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election-oriented topics for a Community Forum or Teach-In include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lowering the Voting Age ○ The Electoral College ○ Voting Rights • Create voter information guides on local, state, or national candidates and/or ballot measures in languages appropriate for your community <p>A few highlights of the <i>Student Voices</i> Project Showcase:</p> <p>Youth Forum with Ambassador Alan Keyes and Senator Barack Obama The U.S. Senate Candidate Youth Forum was an opportunity for the U.S. Senate candidates to hear questions from high school students about the issues that young people face. Chicago Student Voices participants were able to hear directly from the candidates on how they would address some of their most important issues. The students then graded the two candidates on issues such as health and violence. The forum was aired on WTTW Channel 11.</p> <p>Student Interaction with Local Pennsylvania Papers Throughout the year, several local papers ran editorials or comments written by students. The Delaware County Daily Times ran two pages of responses from students in Springfield High School. The Bucks County Courier received about five dozen responses from students in Bensalem High School. The Morning Call in Allentown set up special web pages within its own site during the fall for students in its coverage area. The Morning Call’s editorial pages also ran weekly student comments on the opinion page up until the election. The Reading Eagle also established a page within its website dedicated to providing interactive features such as local issue questions and discussion boards, and links to political and news media websites.</p>	
--	--	--	--

		<p>Overall, 14 newspapers submitted a least one question for their local students to consider and write about, and most of them tried multiple questions over the course of the semester.</p> <p>Testifying at City Council Session Seniors from Central High School attended a city council session on March 17, where decisions on the smoking ban, pay-to-play, and slavery bills were made. Students testified in front of city council about library service cuts, while a group of library workers and community members held up signs of protest.</p>	
<p>Youth Court <i>Set up a Youth Court in your school, an alternative philosophy to the traditional school discipline system.</i></p>	<p>See the website of the National Youth Court Center's website for more information: http://www.youthcourt.net/Resource/FAQ.htm#What is a Youth Court</p> <p>For some basic information about the uses and benefits of Youth Court in high schools, see this PowerPoint (displayed as a pdf file): www.ag.state.il.us/communities/youthadvocacy/school_yc.pdf</p>	<p>The Constitutional Rights Foundation's Service Learning Network presents three Youth Court profiles along with more information about Youth Court as a form of Service Learning: http://www.crf-usa.org/network/net9_3.htm#profile</p>	Peers/School
<p>Oral Histories <i>Students record and publish the life stories of community members.</i></p>	<p>From the History Channel, a guide for conducting oral histories: www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf</p> <p>The Oral History Society's homepage provides some basic information on what oral history is and how it is used: http://www.ohs.org.uk/</p>	<p>For a list of links to dozens of oral history projects, go to http://www.history.msu.edu/~oralhist/projects.html</p> <p>Library of Congress Learning Page presents "All History is Local: Students as Archivists" This archive of primary source materials constitutes the principal activity of a year-long American Studies class focusing on historiography and the use of primary sources. Students collect primary source materials from their families or local communities. In analyzing these primary sources, students examine the interplay between national, state, local, and personal history. http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/local/intro.html</p>	Community

		<p>In this Susquehanna University project, six Latino high school students from the Susquehanna Valley interviewed members of the growing Latino population in Central Pennsylvania. The results of these interviews have been compiled in this web site.</p> <p>http://www.susqu.edu/languages/oralhistory/phase1/</p>	
<p>Local Agency Partnership <i>Find a local organization that focuses on an issue being studied in class and that can incorporate students into its service.</i></p>	<p>The National Service Learning Clearinghouse has ample resources for learning about Service Learning in general: http://www.servicelearning.org/</p> <p>The UC Berkeley Service-Learning Research and Development Center is another resource for designing a project: http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/research/slc/index.html</p>	<p>Check out this extensive list of Service-Learning projects carried out by the Malcolm Shabazz City High School in Madison, Wisconsin: http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/shabazz/sl/Srvlrn_partnr.htm</p>	Community
<p>School Constitution <i>Students create a school constitution that lays out the responsibilities and rights of various members in the school community.</i></p>	<p>Congresslink has posted a lesson plan for writing a school or class constitution: http://www.congresslink.org/print_lp_classconstitution.htm</p>	<p>View Acalanes High School's student-created Constitution at www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/ahs/activities/Acalanes_Constitution.pdf</p>	Peers/School
<p>Cross-Age Teaching <i>Older students teach younger ones about a chosen issue.</i></p>	<p>The Department of Justice publishes <i>Youth in Action</i> online. This issue features Cross-Age Teaching: http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/youthbulletin/9907-2/contents.html</p> <p><i>Building Partnerships with Youth</i> has a Fact Sheet with basic information and links on cross-age teaching, see: http://cals-net.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/content.cfm?content=CrossAge</p>	<p>The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs highlights a cross-age Literacy Club based on the model created by Shirley Brice Heath: http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/pigs/pig13.htm</p>	Peers/School