GENERATING IDEAS FOR A SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

Every community has its own set of successes and challenges. Where you live, the needs of your local community, and the interests of your students will determine the focus of your service-learning project.

In her article "Service Learning and Community Engagement for English Classes" in *English Teaching Forum*, Aida Koci McLeod notes that there are two ways to design service-learning projects. Curriculum-based design examines the content of the curriculum to see how the material that students are learning could benefit the community. Need-based design has students observing issues in the community and brainstorming possible projects.

This week, we will take a need-based approach to lead students through an activity to generate ideas about possible service-learning projects.

BRAINSTORMING ABOUT COMMUNITY ISSUES

Time:

- Part One: 15 minutes
- Approximately 1 week for students to observe and gather information outside of class
- Part Two: 45-60 minutes

Goals:

- To define service learning for students.
- To gather information about issues in the local community.
- To observe community needs and brainstorm possible areas for service-learning projects.
- To determine one area of focus for the service-learning project by voting.

Materials: notebooks or paper (if possible, students can designate a notebook to use throughout the service-learning project for a journal and for all of the activities), pencils, whiteboard or chalkboard with markers or chalk, timer

<div align="center">

PART ONE - INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY

</div>

1. Write the phrase *service learning* on the board. Ask students if they know what service learning is or if they have ideas about what the term means. If you wish, write their ideas on the board.

2. After students have shared what they know about service learning, provide them with a definition (perhaps the one from this month's Introduction) and write it on the board.

3. Allow students time to reflect on the definition and to share their thoughts about it in small groups or as a whole class.

4. Explain to the class that they will be participating in a service-learning project and their next step is to gather information about the needs in the local community. You can give examples of specific issues or ask students to share ideas.

5. Write the table below on the board and have students copy it into their notebooks to use when gathering information outside of class. If you plan to have students use a single notebook for the service-learning project, this can be the first entry.

Community Issue/Problem	Who is affected by the issue?	What is being done to help or to address the problem?

6. Tell students that they can gather information by talking to friends or family members, by reading local newspapers or publications, by interviewing community leaders, by watching news reports, etc.

7. Determine how much time students should spend on collecting information outside of class; one week was suggested in the preparation section. Alternatively, if students do not

have access to the internet or news publications outside of class, you can choose to schedule several class periods for them to do research at school.

8. Set a date for students to come to class with information about at least three issues filled in on the information-gathering table. Answer any questions students may have about the assignment.

PART TWO - BRAINSTORMING, DISCUSSING, AND VOTING

1. On the day that students come to class with their completed information-gathering tables, split the class into groups of about five students. If helpful, have each group assign roles such as recorder, timekeeper, and presenter.

2. Explain that each group member will share the community issues he or she recorded. The rest of the group should listen for any common themes, such as housing, hunger, literacy, etc. Provide students with 15-20 minutes for the discussion. Set a timer if desired.

3. After each group member has shared his or her observations about issues in the community, the group should discuss common issues or problems. Each group should create a list of the top three issues that they identified after sharing and discussion. If there are any particularly unique or interesting community problems that someone shared, those can also be noted in addition to the top three.

4. Once all the groups have had sufficient time to share and discuss ideas, each group will report their top three issues or community problems to the whole class. Depending on the size of your class, this should take 10-20 minutes. As each group names their top issues, write the issues in a list on the board. If issues are repeated, note this by making a tally mark next to the issue on the board. Any unique or interesting issues that were observed by the group can be noted on a separate list.

5. Because students have been observing and collecting information about issues in their community, some common themes should naturally emerge. Ask students to look at the list on the board and determine which issues came up the most. (Do not include the separate list of the unique/interesting issues in this part.)

6. Create a new list of the top three community problems that the class observed during information gathering. Write it next to the list of the unique or interesting issues, if any.

7. Tell students that they will vote on the community issues on this final list to determine the focus issue of the class service-learning project. Explain that after choosing the focus issue, the class will be involved in some type of community service and classroom learning related to that issue.

8. Although the class has yet to design the actual project, it may be helpful to give students some examples of what the community service component could be, such as volunteering time to tutor younger students in reading, cleaning up the environment in a part of your community, writing letters to government officials, etc. Answer any questions students may have.

9. Allow students to vote for the issue(s) that interest them the most. You can ask students to vote for only one, or you can have them rank each issue from the list according to their level of interest (1 - top choice, 2 - second choice, 3 - third choice, etc.). Students can use a small piece of paper torn from their notebooks to vote.

10. Collect all votes before the end of the class period. Count them to determine which issue your class has chosen to focus on for their service-learning project.

The activity presented this week allows students to observe the issues in their community and vote on one area of focus for the service-learning project. The next installment of the Teacher's Corner will explain how to engage students in classroom learning related to the topic they have chosen. Next week's activities will allow students to engage in meaningful use of English as they learn more about an issue facing their community.