

LEARNING MORE ABOUT A COMMUNITY ISSUE

Last week, students observed issues in the local community and brainstormed possible areas of focus for a service-learning project. Now that students have chosen the area of focus, the next step is to learn more about the chosen issue.

In the Introduction to this month's Teacher's Corner, we mentioned that James Minor's definition of a true service-learning project includes both community service and formal learning. This week will present a Guided Seminar activity that will help students fulfill the "formal learning" portion of the definition. By participating in the Guided Seminar, students will learn more about the community issue they have chosen while practicing meaningful use of English.

GUIDED SEMINAR

Time:

- One class period for pre-reading and for answering key questions (This can also be assigned outside of class.)
- One class period for the seminar
- About 20 minutes of time outside of class for the post-seminar reflection

Goals:

- To have students read information about the community issue in English.
- To participate in meaningful discussion about the issue with classmates in English.
- To write a reflection in English.

Materials: article(s), videos or news clips, radio clips, or social media posts about the chosen issue; key questions (see examples in Preparation Step 2); discussion stems (see examples in Procedure Step 2); service-learning project notebooks and pencils

Preparation:

1. Choose one or two articles or news clips for students to read or watch before the seminar. All students will consume the same material beforehand in order to promote thoughtful discussion.
2. Write a few open-ended questions based on the material students are using. Give students a chance to copy these questions into their notebooks. Examples of the type of questions include:
 - a. Was any information that you found in the material surprising? What information made an impression on you as you were reading/watching?
 - b. Have you noticed the effects of this issue in our community? Where, and what have you experienced or observed?
 - c. How would you feel if this issue was a problem for you and your family? Or, if it has been a problem for your family, how has it affected you?
 - d. What do you think are some possible solutions for this problem? Who should be responsible for taking action to start solving this problem?
3. Give students time in class to read or watch the information, or assign the material for homework. Have students reflect and answer these questions in their service-learning notebooks after they read or watch the material you have chosen.
4. Talk to students about the seminar and your expectations for the discussion. Note that during a seminar, the students really lead the discussion and the teacher acts as more of a facilitator. Students usually do not raise their hands; instead, they simply begin talking, one at a time, while others listen and respond. Depending on your students, you can practice this ahead of time if it will be helpful.

Procedure:

1. If you are able to do so, arrange chairs or the students themselves in a large circle on the day of your seminar. Sitting in a circle will encourage discussion amongst students. If not, you can still conduct the seminar in your normal classroom setting.
2. Write the discussion stems below, as well as any others you can think of, on the board. If needed, provide students with examples of how to use these.

- I agree/disagree with _____ because...
 - I would like to add that...
 - I want to know more about...
 - This made me think of _____ because...
 - I would like to ask _____ about...
 - I was surprised to learn...
 - I felt _____ when I read...
 - I would like to ask <student's name> what he/she thinks about...
3. Before starting the discussion, review procedures and expectations for the seminar with your students. Remind them about the guidelines for taking turns, listening, and responding to classmates. Answer any questions that students may have.
 4. Ask students to take out the article(s) they read and the reflection questions they answered in their notebooks. Give them a few minutes to review their responses. If students watched news clips, you can replay the clips or have students chat in pairs about what they remember from the clips. While students review, you can write the reflection questions on the board.
 5. Tell students that they will participate in a guided discussion about the community issue they have been learning about. Explain that you will ask one of the reflection questions and anyone can start the discussion by sharing their thoughts or ideas. Tell students that they can refer to the article/news clips or their notes but should not read directly from their notebooks.
 6. Read the first reflection question from the board and allow students to respond. Remind students of expectations throughout the seminar if needed. Let students know that they can ask each other questions directly using each other's names. This can be helpful for encouraging all students to participate.
 7. Continue until all of the key questions have been addressed. Based on the discussion and level of interest of the students, you can pose follow-up questions during the seminar to further engage students with the topic.

8. To wrap up the seminar, you may choose to pose a closing question and give students time to respond with a short answer. It is helpful to share some possible answers with students before asking them to respond. Here are some examples:
 - What is one word that comes to mind when you think about this community issue? (Example answers: tragic, opportunity, hope, help, etc.)
 - Respond with one word that describes how this issue makes you feel. (Example answers: inspired, hopeless, worried, motivated, etc.)
 - What is one word or phrase that you can use to describe what is needed to improve this issue in our community? (Example answers: caring, generosity, time, money, hope, etc.)
9. Once students have had a chance to answer the final question, explain that the last step will be to reflect on the seminar in their notebooks. Because this activity is preparing learners to participate in meaningful service learning, it is suggested that you ask students to write about ways the class can engage with the community issue they have chosen to have a positive impact.
10. Write the final reflection question on the board for students to copy into their notebooks. You might write and ask “What ideas do you have for activities related to this issue that our class can do to have a positive impact on the community?” or something similar.
11. If helpful, give students time to share a few ideas with the whole class. Then, assign students the task of writing ideas in their notebooks (either as homework or during the next class period).

Extensions:

1. It should be noted that this seminar can be repeated several times over the duration of the service-learning project. Students can read or watch additional materials about the community issue and answer new questions in a seminar discussion. This activity can also be used to reflect on experiences when students are engaged in the project. More information about how to do this will be shared in Week 4.

The Guided Seminar allows students to use English to learn more about the community issue they are interested in. Learners also use English to engage in thoughtful, structured conversation about the topic, to reflect on what they have learned, and to generate ideas.

The final step in this week's activity asks students to begin thinking about how the class can engage in service related to the community issue they have selected. This will be the starting point for designing the community service component of the service-learning project. Next week the Teacher's Corner will present several ways for students to become actively involved with the community issue they have chosen.