

Lesson Plan: The Meaning of Community

In this lesson, students will begin to examine different types of communities. They will work individually and collaboratively to determine the elements that make Fairfax County a community. This lesson could be used as part of the stand alone unit on local government or could be modified for use at the beginning of the year as teachers work to create a sense of classroom community.

Connection to POS: Standard 8.1

- ◆ *Students will be able realize the expectations that responsible citizens become informed about and involved with contemporary and continuing issues in civic life (8.1.3.a.)*
- ◆ *Explain the responsibilities of a citizen in the family, school, community, state, nation, and the world. (8.1.2.a)*

SOL Standard: 7.9



Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of the word *community* and apply it to Fairfax County.
- ◆ identify the qualities needed to create a sense of community and begin to view their classroom as an example of community.
- ◆ assess the quality of life in Fairfax County.
- ◆ identify issues in the community that require the attention of local officials.



Materials

- ◆ chalkboard or butcher paper



Time Needed

- ◆ 30-45 minutes



Procedures

1. As a bellringer, ask students to write a response to the following in their journal or notebook: They are on a holiday trip to Orlando, Florida. They meet someone who asks "Hey, where do you live?" How would they respond to that question? Give students a few minutes and ask for responses. Make a list on the board or on newsprint for the class to see. Use students to record the responses. Discuss.
2. In a large group, have students brainstorm the meaning of the word *community*. Write their responses on the board or an overhead. Ask students to get into small groups and to develop a definition of community that they agree on. Have a member of each group share their definition with the class. Look for similarities. Try to reach a class consensus of what is a community. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Fairfax County meeting the definition of community.
3. Have students research the opinions of family members and neighbors. Tell them to compare responses of people who are native to the County or have lived here a long time to those who have been here less than three years. They should record responses in their civics notebook/journal.



Assessment

- ◆ Have students collect items that they feel exemplify life in Fairfax County or represent the people and institutions here in the county. They should illustrate a plain lunch sack or other bag and use it to bring the items to class. Students should then conduct a 3-5 minute "bag talk" on their items highlighting such themes as local history, economic development, the ethnic composition of the county, and future outlook
- ◆ Assign students to summarize their thinking in a two-page essay entitled "What Makes Fairfax County a Community."



Extensions

- ◆ Invite County officials to speak to the class on the topic of community.

Fairfax County Program of Studies: "Closest To The People"

- ◆ Determine if your town/city has a “sister city” elsewhere in the world. If so, help students make contact with children of the same age in that community. Establish e-pals and have students keep a journal where they reflect on similarities/differences between the two communities. This could also be done as a whole class activity.
- ◆ Have the class make a video with a wide variety of citizen interviews (“person-in-the-street style”) on the topic of community.
- ◆ Survey various local media formats (Channel 8, cable channels, local newspapers) to determine what is getting mentioned and shown about the community. Note both positive and negative coverage. This could be assigned to each student as an extended activity, perhaps two to four weeks. Have students prepare a portfolio of various examples of what is in the news about the community.
- ◆ Invite a local newsperson (print and/or electronic) to speak to your class on the topic of community news—what is covered and what is not.
- ◆ Mapping a community: See Lesson Plan: *Community Awareness: A Place Called Fairfax*, p. III-9.



Differentiations

- ◆ Allow students to work in pairs to present "bag talks" to alleviate anxiety about public speaking. Note cards may also be helpful prompts for them.



Interdisciplinary Connections

- ◆ Along with the English teacher on your team, teach a novel unit using books with the theme of community (i.e., *Lord of the Flies*.) This will help students begin to understand what basic elements can be found in all communities as well as how answering questions regarding the provision of goods and governance determine certain elements of the community.
- ◆ At the same time that the students are studying the periodic table in science, have them create a periodic table of the elements of community. Items could include services, taxpayers, schools, county leaders, and any other ideas that they offered while trying to generate a definition of the term community.