

Project-based learning

Community Service

OBJECTIVES

Students pairs will:

- ▶ learn about the important role volunteers play in society, the reasons people choose to volunteer and the rewards that service can bring.
- ▶ choose a person or group in their community to volunteer for.
- ▶ use the newspaper to promote literacy or foster discussion in their community.

STANDARDS

This project meets the following national standards for middle school:

NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies - *Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.* (NCTE)

NL-ENG.K-12.6 – Applying Knowledge - *Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.* (NCTE)

NL-ENG.K-12.11 – Participating in Society - *Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.* (NCTE)

WEEK 1: As the holiday season nears, it's a great time to reflect on the past year and think of ways that you can help others in your community. A volunteer is someone who does just that! Volunteers provide help, perform services or take on obligations voluntarily and without compensation. In short, volunteers devote their time and energy to a cause for free. People volunteer for a variety of reasons – to help others who are less fortunate; to improve or give back to the community; to make a difference in the world around them.

Did you know that volunteers can do almost anything? From visiting sick children in the hospital to coaching a sports team to helping an elderly neighbor with his or her shopping, volunteers make a vital contribution to all aspects of community life. This project is going to give you a chance to volunteer by reading the newspaper and discussing current events with someone in your community.

With a partner, decide where in your community there is a need for volunteer services, e.g., tutoring a child; teaching an adult to read; reading to the elderly, etc. Your volunteer activity should involve the newspaper and can target an individual or a group.

WEEK 2: Last week, you learned the important role that volunteers play in the community. This week, you will decide what specific person or group you want to assist. Your volunteer efforts will focus on literacy and community service. (Remember: Just because a person already knows how to read doesn't mean he or she wouldn't enjoy reading the newspaper and discussing current events with you.)

Before contacting someone to offer your time, answer the following questions: Why do you want to volunteer? How much time can you give? At what time of day? What do you hope to gain from volunteering, e.g. meeting people, gaining new skills, feeling good about yourself? What skills or experience can you offer? How will you get to and from your volunteer location? Once you have answered all of these questions, decide whom you will offer your services to. Be sure to devise a back-up option in case your first plan doesn't work out.

WEEK 3: You and your partner have identified a specific person or group to assist. Now it's time to put your plan into action. Contact the person or organization that you would like to help. Let them know who you are, why you are calling, when and where you want to volunteer and what you hope to gain from the experience. Then, set up an initial 15-20 minute meeting to get acquainted with the person or group. During the first meeting, discuss your volunteer project and how you envision conducting your session. Be sure both parties are clear on the goal of your efforts. During your meeting, you may want to review the answers to last week's questions to help you plan your time. Also, don't be afraid to ask the person/people with whom you are meeting questions!

WEEK 4: So far you have contacted a person or group and committed to volunteering time reading the newspaper and discussing current events. This week, you will meet and visit with the person/group. During the allotted time, take notes (either mentally or on paper) of the experience so that you can share it with others later. After the session, briefly answer each of the following questions: Was volunteering what you expected it would be? How did it make you feel? What did you find most/least enjoyable about the experience? Most surprising? Would you volunteer again? Why or why not? As a class, discuss your volunteer efforts and the benefits they had on those in your community. Why are volunteers important? What if no one volunteered? How would your community be different? Then, on your own, decide whether or not you want to continue your efforts in the New Year.