

Lesson 1: The Importance of Civic Participation

- **7th grade Texas History**

- **Duration:** 45 minutes

- **History TEKS:**

(16) Citizenship. *The student understands the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens in a democratic society. The student is expected to:*

(A) Identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important Texas issues, past and present.

(B) Describe the importance of free speech and press in a democratic society.

- **Learning Objective(s):**

- *Students will be able to identify examples of civic participation.*
- *Students will be able to develop a list of issues affecting them currently and identify what issues are important to them.*

- **Materials:**

- *Agree/Disagree handout (1 per student)*
 - *Examples of Civic Participation Cards (1 set per pair of students)*
 - *Solutions suggestions (for teacher)*
 - *Student notebooks or plain paper (1 per student)*
 - *“What issues are important to you?” Questionnaire (1 for each student)*
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- **Warm Up:**

1. Prior to students entering the room, create signs to label one side of the room “Agree” and the opposite side “Disagree”.
2. As students enter the room, hand students the “Civic Participation Questions” (attached).
3. Instruct students to answer each question by circling agree or disagree.
4. Once all students have made their decisions, teacher will read aloud each statement and students will move to the appropriate position in the room and be prepared to defend their choice.
5. Have the students discuss with their groups why they made their choice and then call on a few students to share out with the class.
6. Repeat for each statement.
7. Note: It is important that students make their choices before they move so they are more true to themselves and are less likely to give into peer pressure.

- **Lesson Procedure:**

- Explain to students they can make a difference in their community and there are many ways to get involved on campus and in the community.
- Distribute the “Examples of Civic Participation” cards (attached) to each pair of students.
- Instruct students to read each scenario with their partner and develop a plausible solution to the community issue. Students should record their solutions in their notebooks.
- Once complete, students will turn to the pair behind them and share together in a group of four to compare their solutions. Teacher should monitor student conversation and provide feedback as needed.
- Teacher will then reveal the list of solutions to explore how the students’ solutions match up. Discuss how there can be multiple solutions to the same problem, and how there can be different types of solutions, such as volunteering, influencing decision-makers or raising awareness
- Instruct students that they will be identifying key problems within their community, researching the root of the problem and creating a plausible solution.
- Ask students to name different areas where problems could come up in schools and communities. Here are some areas that you may try to draw out, but let the students generate the ideas as much as possible.

a. Community

1. Environmental (water waste, city recycling programs, pollution)
2. Health (heart disease, diabetes, nutrition, food for hungry families, places to exercise)
3. Transportation and housing infrastructure (affordable housing, new housing developments, roads, buses and bus stops)
4. Safety (criminal justice system, violence, car seats, texting and driving, animal cruelty)
5. Economic (employment, business development, poverty, homelessness, neighborhood wellbeing)
6. City policy (laws, rules, zoning)
7. Parks, Rec Centers (after-school programs, maintenance of grounds)
8. Arts and culture (museums, libraries, bookmobile)

b. School

1. Student integrity (cheating)
2. Student achievement (academic success)
3. Discipline policies (suspension)
4. Student safety (bullying, school violence)
5. School climate (friendliness and happiness of students and teachers)
6. Student leadership
7. School pride issue
8. Student health and wellness
9. Student opportunities (classes or extracurricular activities)
10. Parent involvement

- After discussion, give each student a copy of the “What Issues are Important to You?” questionnaire. Instruct each student to write down at least three very specific issues that they’re concerned about in their community.
- Collect these sheets and analyze the student questionnaire to develop groups with common interest for their community. Create a seating chart for day 2 that will have students grouped by common interests. Keep groups to 3-4 people.

Assessment: Student responses to the issue cards during activity.

Modifications: Questionnaire can also be completed as a homework assignment, on paper, or online.

Solutions Key for use with “Examples of Civic Participation” cards.

Note: these are just suggested solutions.

1. Our city was ranked one of the most obese cities in America. We’re worried about the health of our families and friends and want the people in our community to live a long, healthy life.

- **Solution:** Students, teachers and staff organized an after-school program to teach about healthy eating, active lifestyles, and provide fitness activities. The events are open to everyone in the community and incentives were available to encourage participation.

2. Students at Austin Middle School are struggling with reading without much support from family at home.

- **Solution:** Students start a parent/student after-school book club with the help of a local business. The club helped increase student achievement and taught parents reading strategies to implement at home.

3. The number of students making honor roll at Sky Middle School keeps getting smaller.

- **Solution:** Students worked with local grocery stores to offer free snacks and treats to students who stayed after school for tutorials

4. Several fatal traffic accidents have occurred in the same intersection in the past two months.

- **Solution:** Students started a letter-writing campaign to the city to encourage them to install new traffic lights and red light cameras into the intersection.

5. The streets around town are completely filled with litter. It seems no one is taking care of the common areas around our town anymore.

- **Solution:** Students organized a liter clean up volunteer group that identifies local service organizations and students groups to take turns cleaning up the most littered zones around town. They also got the cities to place more public trash cans in the most needed areas.

6. The local parks have become dangerous places for young people to hang out.

- **Solution:** School clubs have organized to help clean up the litter, and they spoke at a city council meeting, asking for an increased number of peace officers on foot patrol in the park and build a new playground to attract families to the park.

7. The elderly population in our town continues to rise and our resources remain limited.

- **Solution:** School clubs became involved with the local nursing homes to provide weekly entertainment, holiday gifts and volunteer hours.

8. Local politicians seem out of touch with the needs of the students in the school district.

- **Solution:** A student advisory board was created to meet monthly with local politicians to keep them informed of the concerns of the young people in the community and to help find solutions to everyday problems in the community.

Circle whether you agree or disagree to the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers, and it is okay to change your mind later. Be prepared to discuss your choices.

Agree / Disagree	Young people have the power to make changes in their communities.
Agree / Disagree	Young people and adults notice the same problems in their communities.
Agree / Disagree	Adults usually listen to young people when they make suggestions.
Agree / Disagree	A lot of the problems in our society can be improved by educating people and giving them information on how to make things better.
Agree / Disagree	If you know how to fix a problem by yourself, you should just do it.
Agree / Disagree	To really get something done, people need to work together. The more the better.
Agree / Disagree	A good way to change social problems is to change rules, policies and laws.
Agree / Disagree	To change something in a school or city, the most important thing to do is talk to the people in charge.
Agree / Disagree	

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Agree / Disagree	

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

What Issues are Important to You?

Fill in some specific issues that you're concerned about in your school or community.

Be specific: State what the problem is in this school/community.

Try to come up with at least three issues.

1. School concerns

- Student integrity:
- Student achievement:
- Discipline policies:
- Student safety:
- School climate:
- Student leadership:
- School pride:
- Student opportunities:
- Student health and wellness :
- Parent Involvement:
- Other:

2. Community concerns

- Environment :
- Health:
- Transportation and housing:
- Safety:
- Economy:
- City policy:
- Parks, rec centers:
- Arts and culture:
- Other:

If you could choose one topic to research and develop a solution for, which topic would interest you the most?

Students at Austin Middle School are struggling with reading without much support from family at home.

Truancy has become a major problem for Stevens Middle School.

Several fatal traffic accidents have occurred in the same intersection in the past two months.

The local parks have become littered with trash and are dangerous places for teens to hang out.

The elderly population in our town continues to rise and our resources remain limited.

Local politicians seem out of touch with the needs of the students in the school district.

Our city was ranked one of the most obese cities in America.

The number of students making honor roll at Sky Middle School keeps getting smaller.