LESSON 2

MY COMMUNITY: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

"TODAY'S PROBLEMS SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOLVED IN THE 1950s, BUT IN THE '50s WE WERE SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE '20s, AND IN THE '20s WE WERE SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE 1890s."

Sidney Harris

My Community: What Does It Look Like?

Prework for students: Read and complete: "Community: A Work in Progress."

Objective

By the end of this lesson, students will have a better understanding of the meaning of community and will know more about how their own community works.

Opening

"What do we mean by a 'community'? What are its features?"

Strategies

- Discuss the reading "Community: A Work in Progress." Ask students to discuss their responses to the questions included in the reading.
- Do the Exploring Our Community Exercise. Note that this exercise may be accomplished solely in the classroom *or* in the form of a School or Community Walkabout. Discuss student findings and, on a flip chart, write down the community's assets on one page, its liabilities on another, and its interesting features on a third page. Post these pages on the wall.
- Notebooks: Ask students to include a summary of key findings in their notebooks (or you can create a handout for them to include).

Reflection Questions

- What does my community look like physically?
- Is my community a friendly place to be?
- What are the things I like best about my community? What would I change if I could?
- In what ways might we, as students, make a real contribution to our community?
- What did I learn from the interview assignment?

Closure and Transition

"Now that we have surveyed our community and interviewed adult residents who have seen the community develop and change over time, let us see if we can sharpen our focus and look at our community through the lens of ethics."

Homework Assignment

Have students interview at least one adult from the community (see Exploring Our Community Exercise for details). Alternatively, see Subject Adaptation Suggestions at the end of this lesson. In preparation for Lesson 3, ask students to read the essay, "There's Only Ethics . . . ," found in Lesson 3.

Lesson Assessment: Revisions for Next Time _____

COMMUNITY: A WORK IN PROGRESS

WHAT IS "COMMUNITY"?

The dictionary presents a number of definitions of "community." Here are some of the most common definitions:

1) a) all the people living in a particular district, city, etc.
   b) the district, city, etc. where they live
2) a group of people living together as a smaller social unit within a larger one, and having interests, work, etc. in common
3) a group of nations loosely or closely associated because of common traditions or for political or economic advantage
4) society in general; the public

—*Webster's New World Dictionary* (Simon & Schuster, 1988)

How are these definitions similar?

How are they different?

In his essay "Building Community," Common Cause founder John W. Gardner wrote:

> *Where community exists, it confers upon its members identity, a sense of belonging, a measure of security." In return, "the individual gives something back—at the very least, allegiance and some measure of commitment to the society. . . . That's the deal. You are free within a framework of obligations—to your family, to loved ones, to community, nation, species.*

▶ *In your own words, explain Dr. Gardner's main point:*

You are about to embark on an experience in which you will be directly involved with providing a real (and needed) service to your community. Whether your experience will take place inside or outside the school setting, you will want to learn more about what makes your community tick and what role *you* might play to make things even better.

Before starting, you will need to clarify the boundaries of your community—is it a neighborhood? The whole city or town? The block where you live? Your school? In the paragraphs that follow, you will read about an *imaginary, ideal* community; that is, the attributes described here will include the kinds of positive features we all would want to enjoy wherever we might live, work, or go to school.

Our imaginary community is called Sandhurst, and it is an example of a community that works very well. Let's explore some of the reasons why.

Wholeness Incorporating Diversity

Sandhurst is a culturally and religiously diverse community. Over the past 25 years, especially, people from a variety of backgrounds have moved to Sandhurst because it is a "nice place to live, to raise your kids, and to retire." One of the most interesting features of Sandhurst is that, when new people began to arrive, longtime residents welcomed them with open arms. They saw how diversity would make Sandhurst a more interesting, vibrant place to live. In return, newcomers respected the history, traditions, and values of the community and made an honest effort to "fit in" first before suggesting changes.

Shared Values

Why, you might say, did newcomers try to "fit in," rather than trying to remake Sandhurst according to their own particular vision? Well, for one thing, they chose Sandhurst because of the values they saw demonstrated there. They liked that it was a safe place to live and that the people were friendly. It seemed like people dealt with you fairly and honestly. And since this is how we all want to be treated, it made sense that they would respond in kind.

Caring and Cooperation

In Sandhurst, people make a point of addressing any problems or issues that may come up. When a wave of robberies occurred one year, for example, a special meeting was called to address the problem. Some people worried that older people living alone might be hurt. Others feared that teenagers would be blamed. At first no one could agree on a solution. But

people were respected and listened to as they voiced their views. In the end, a solution was agreed to by most. A committee of volunteers was formed to take action on the matter.

Good Communication

Sandhurst has a tradition of open communications and a rich network of organizations that meet regularly to tackle mutual problems. The people who run the local newspaper, for example, believe it is their personal responsibility to help citizens become better informed. And when an important decision needs to be made, such as when a group of citizens wanted to build a new recreation center, community leaders called a special meeting to discuss the subject. All residents were invited to attend.

Participation

There are many examples of community participation in Sandhurst. For one thing, people tend to believe that every person's vote is important, and so they have one of the highest voter turnout rates in their state. Also, people of all ages volunteer, particularly those who have retired and who see it as their duty to give back to their community now that they have more time to do so. Teenagers help too, both in school and out of school, by providing community services such as cleaning up the local park, planting flowers at a local nursing home, and tutoring younger children. Everyone has an important role to play.

Affirmation

Every July, the community puts on a big party where everyone in the community gets together to share food, play games, and celebrate community values such as freedom, cooperation, and respect for all. Throughout the year Sandhurst has a number of other traditions as well, such as a program put on by elementary-school students during the winter holidays and an annual awards ceremony to recognize those citizens who have provided outstanding service to the community.

Future Oriented

Young people, every Sandhurst citizen knows, are the future, and any vision of Sandhurst 10 or 20 or 30 years down the road must take into account how well prepared the town's young people will be for their future roles as leaders and stewards. Sandhurst citizens consciously invest

in their schools—they provide the financial support necessary to offer a solid education, and they openly respect and admire their teachers. An active adult-to-child mentoring program is sponsored by the local YMCA.

▶ *Specify your community here:* _____

In what ways is your community like Sandhurst? [Circle the response that applies after each question and give an example that supports your answer.]

▶ *Do people respect and appreciate other cultures, religions, and age groups?*

Yes, almost always Sometimes No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people share the same basic values?*

Yes, almost always Sometimes No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people care about what happens in the community and work together to fix any problems that arise?*

Yes, almost always Sometimes No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people keep informed about what's happening and talk to one another regularly?*

Yes, almost always Sometimes No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people in your community volunteer to help out when needed?*

Yes, almost always Sometimes No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people get together, on occasion, to celebrate that they* are, *in fact, a community?*

Yes, regularly Sometimes No, not ever

Example: ✎

▶ *Do people care about young people and the future?*

Yes, most do Some do No, not much

Example: ✎

▶ *In what ways is your community different from an ideal one such as Sandhurst? Describe those differences briefly here:*

✎

In the next few lessons, you will be taking a closer look at the community you have chosen to study. What does it look like? What are its best features? What would you change if you could? Also, what are its values, and how well do its citizens live up to those values?

Exploring Our Community Exercise

For more ideas about how to explore your community, see the Active Citizenship Today Field Guide *(1994) published by Close Up Foundation (703-706-3640) and the Constitutional Rights Foundation (213-487-5590).*

Purpose

- To improve student awareness of the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of their community in preparation for identifying a service-learning project that will meet a real community need

Preparation and Materials

Flip chart and markers. A note pad for each student. For the Community Walkabout, prepare a blown-up map of the community that can be divided into sections.

Process

- Open by discussing the reading and key questions in the Exploring Our Community Exercise. Then continue with either Option A or Option B.
- **Option A.** Tell students that today they are going to begin to explore their community by drawing it. Ask each student to:
  - Make a list of all the *things* their community is made up of.
  - Draw a picture of the community, using symbols and words as needed.
  - In small groups of students (five to six), talk about their pictures.
  - Ask small groups to work together to make one big picture of the community based on their individual sketches and post the group picture on the wall. As students think of new things, add them to the picture.
- **Option B.** Community Walkabout: Tell students that today they will begin exploring their community by actually walking (or driving) around an assigned section of it. [If your "community" will be the school itself, adapt this activity to be a School Walkabout.]
  - Distribute sections of the community map, giving one section to each group of two to four students.
  - Ask these small groups to draw a detailed map of their assigned section, including such things as buildings, parks, waterways, dumps, railroad tracks, businesses, hangouts, etc.

  - In small-group discussions, talk about what they discovered and what problems, if any, they observed.
  - Small groups will then present an overview of their section of the community to the class as a whole.

- A physical picture of the community is just a start. Students need to learn more about their community's people, its history, and the organizations and businesses that comprise the community. Have the same small groups reconvene to talk about and complete the Key Features Worksheet.

- As a class of the whole, on separate flip-chart pages, list the community's assets, liabilities, and interesting features (those features that are neither an asset nor a liability but seem significant in some other way). Be sure to recognize (celebrate!) the community's assets as much as its liabilities. Post these on the wall along with the maps.

- For homework, ask each student to interview at least one adult from the community (the adult could be a parent) and ask them several of the following questions:
  - How long have you lived in this community?
  - Does the community look different than it did when you first came?
  - Have the people seemed to change in any way? What about young people, specifically?
  - Are the problems we have today different from, say, 10 or 20 years ago? What is the biggest problem facing us here today?
  - What do you like most about our community? What makes it special?
  - What do you like least about our community?
  - What's the most important thing we need to change?
  - If you were to volunteer to do only one thing in this community, what would it be?

- Discuss student findings and adjust the asset/liability lists accordingly.

KEY FEATURES WORKSHEET

Is this an:	Asset	Liability	Interesting Feature	None of the Above

▶ **Physical Features:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Businesses:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Nonprofits:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Services:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

	Asset	Liability	Interesting Feature	None of the Above

▶ **People:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Government Services:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Media:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

▶ **Other:**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Asset: A valuable or desirable thing

Liability: Something unpleasant or unwanted

Interesting Feature: A feature that excites curiosity or attention

Community Interview Questions

Interviewer: _____

Person Interviewed: _____

Date: _____

1) How long have you lived in this community?

2) Does the community look different than it did when you first came?

3) Have the people seemed to change in any way?

4) What about young people, specifically?

5) Are the problems we have today different from, say, 10 or 20 years ago?

6) What's the biggest problem facing us here today?

7) What do you like most about our community? What makes it special?

8) What do you like least about our community?

9) What's the most important thing we need to change?

10) If you were to volunteer to do only one thing in this community, what would it be?

Subject Adaptation Suggestions

History and Social Studies

- Ask students to research one of the community's key features and write a report on how that feature has affected the community over time.

Language Arts

- Have students write an essay on one of the key features of the community, including an analysis of whether or not the feature is an asset or a liability and why.
- Ask students to write up their interviews with adults in the community, or to make an oral presentation to the class regarding what they learned from the experience.

Math and Science

- Read about map making—its history and purposes—before venturing out to map the community. Ahead of time, ask students to consider the scale they will use in drawing their maps, and have them outline (using exact measurements) their section of the community map.

Visual Arts

- Read about map making—its history and purposes—before venturing out to map the community. Ahead of time, ask students to create a set of symbols to record various features on their maps. For example, these symbols could reflect physical features:

e.g.,  building,

or problem areas:

e.g.,  litter

 air pollution

- For the interview assignment, form groups of three to four students. Have them videotape each other's interviews and, as a group, edit their videotape to 15 minutes, to be shared with the entire class.