



The Role of Parks and Open Spaces in Society

Model K-12 Service-Learning Lessons

Source: RMC Research Corporation, June 2009

For additional resources on this and other service-learning topics visit Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at www.servicelearning.org.

Overview

Learners will research the history of the National Park Service, the EPA, and the role of local park & recreation departments. After they have gained an understanding of the functions and importance of these departments, as well as the value of preserving open space, they will implement a service project in which they will collaborate with local leaders and organizations in order to clean up a local park. Through research, reflection, and contact with the local government regarding the protection of parkland, they will develop their English and social studies skills and also learn about environmental impacts and protection.

Contents

1. *Lesson Plan Information.* Description of lesson content:
 - a. Standards addressed
 - b. Objectives
 - c. Time and materials needed

2. *Service Learning Components.* Description of lesson using the five service-learning components:
 - a. Investigation
 - b. Preparation
 - c. Action
 - d. Reflection
 - e. Demonstration/Celebration

3. *Standards:* description of how lessons meet each of the standards.
 - a. Duration and Intensity
 - b. Link to Curriculum
 - c. Partnerships
 - d. Meaningful Service
 - e. Youth Voice
 - f. Diversity
 - g. Reflection
 - h. Progress Monitoring



Lesson Plan Information

Title: The Role of Parks and Open Spaces in Society (Clean-Up of a Local Park)

Grade level(s): 7-12

Subject area(s): Environmental Education, Social Studies, History, Government

Standards addressed: Wisconsin Standards

Environmental Education

- Use critical thinking strategies to interpret and analyze gathered information
- Explain and cite examples of how humans shape the environment
- Analyze how people impact their environment through resource use
- Research the roles of various careers related to natural resources management and other environmental fields
- Identify governmental and private agencies responsible for environmental protection and natural resource management
- Explain how personal actions can impact an environmental issue (e.g., doing volunteer work in conservation)
- Take action in regard to environmental issues in the home, school, or communities

Social Studies

- Locate, organize, analyze, and use information from various sources to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and communicate the position
- Explain and analyze how different political and social movements have sought to mobilize public opinion and obtain governmental support in order to achieve their goals

English Language Arts

- Interpret and use technical resources such as charts, tables, travel schedules, timelines, and manuals
- Analyze and synthesize the concepts and details encountered in informational texts such as reports, technical manuals, historical papers, and government documents
- Compose and publish analytic and reflective writing that conveys knowledge, experience, insights, and opinions to an intended audience
- Prepare and publish technical writing such as memos, applications, letters, reports and resumes for various audiences, attending to details of layout and format as appropriate to purpose
- Develop and deliver a speech that conveys information and ideas in logical fashion for a selected audience, using language that clarifies and reinforces meaning
- Synthesize and present results of research projects, accurately summarizing and illustrating the main ideas, using appropriate technological aids, and offering support for the conclusions
- Create multimedia presentations in connection with major projects, such as research reports or exhibitions
- Use research tools found in school and college libraries, take notes, collect and classify sources, and develop strategies for finding and recording information

Objectives:

- Students will research the history of the EPA and the national parks movement, and learn about the role of parks and open spaces with society.
- Students will learn about local service agencies and environmental groups.
- Students will learn about the societal and demographic correlates of delinquency and crime.
- Students will summarize the results research.
- Students will organize an educational campaign to raise awareness of a local environmental issue.
- Students will develop problem solving, communication and teamwork skills.
- Students will learn how to collaborate with community partners to address an issue of local concern.

Time needed for completion: 6-8 weeks

Materials needed: Computers; lists of city, county, and state environmental departments and organizations; camera; printing materials

Cost (if any): Depends upon success in obtaining donated materials for park clean-up

Keywords: National Parks Movement, Environment, Vandalism, Clean Up

Service-Learning Components

Investigation:

For this service-learning project, students first started learning about the role of parks and open spaces in American society. Students were divided into groups and researched the history of the National Park Service, the EPA, and the role of local park & recreation departments. Student groups were instructed to prepare a report, to be presented to the class, about the results of their research. Reports were to include historical individuals, their goals and purposes, relevant laws and policies, and historical timelines. Students graded each other's presentations based on content, organization, and style.

In class students researched and compiled a list of parks, open spaces, and recreational areas that were in the area. Students then voted on 3 areas that they would like to visit. After obtaining permission from the school administration and from students' parents, the class went on a field trip to visit the three areas they had selected. At each area, a park ranger or area representative gave a presentation about the origin and history of that area. Specific connections were made between the parks that were visited, the local government and history, the history of the parks movement. Back in the classroom, students wrote about what they had learned, and reflected on the role each park played in the local community.

Preparation:

Students were informed that they would be working on a project that would benefit one of the parks they had visited. In class, the students were guided through a discussion in which they decided which park to focus upon. Students were asked to provide supporting arguments for their choices, and prompted to consider the nature of the different communities surrounding the parks. Once the specific park was chosen, students used local newspaper archives and the Internet to research the park regarding its history and needs. One classroom activity had students compiling statistics about the park, and comparing them to data gathered from other parks and from the national forest service.

To facilitate their assessment of the needs of the park, students brainstormed in class to identify local leaders and organizations that were knowledgeable about the park and could help. The students then crafted a letter to the potential partners outlining the information they had gathered so far, stating that they were preparing a project that would benefit the park, and requesting help. The letters were assessed for content and clarity. The partners, which included town and county representatives, law enforcement officers, and park and forest officials, visited the classroom and informed the students about their specific job and discussed a number of concerns and issues regarding parks and open spaces in general, and the needs of their specific park. At the conclusion of these presentations, students wrote about the role the presenters played within the community, and specifically placed their project within the context of the local government.

After some classroom discussion and a vote, the students decided to address vandalism in the park. This was an area of growing concern for this park, which was located in an economically disadvantaged part of the city.

Partners, particularly a law enforcement representative, were invited into the class to discuss the causes and consequences of vandalism, and students studied societal correlates of crime and vandalism, and strategies to curb vandalism. Related classroom activities included having students graph the prevalence of vandalism and other crimes over time using national crime statistics. Classroom lessons on the role of law enforcement in government, and sociological and demographic correlates of crime, were linked to the service-learning project. One reflection activity involved a discussion of characteristics and trends of the community surrounding the park that might be related to the increased vandalism. Students were prompted to try to understand why a person might decide to engage in vandalism.

In collaborating with the partners, the students decided that they wanted to organize a 'clean-up the parks day,' and brainstormed ideas on how to get volunteers. They decided to prepare a community education campaign that would raise awareness about the importance of parks and open spaces to communities and about vandalism at the park. Working in class, students broke into groups and organized the results of their research into 20 minute presentations on the importance of the park and the vandalism issue it faced. Students were instructed to include PowerPoint slides and supporting video and pictures that were gathered from the internet, the local parks & recreation department, and the forest service. The student were given class time to practice their

presentation. Students provided feedback to each other on how to improve their presentations.

The students created a plan to present their research to several schools and service organizations within the district. Each student group presented to at least one school or organization, so as to minimize the amount of time each student had to spend outside of class. At the conclusion of the each presentation, the students solicited volunteers for their 'clean-up the park day.'

Action:

Working with the partners, the volunteer day was scheduled for a Saturday following the presentations. The partners worked with the students to identify specific aspects of the vandalism problem that volunteers could safely address. Some examples included removal of graffiti, painting park buildings, and replacement of some fixtures in the park bathroom. Students collaborate with partners in determining supplies that were needs for the various projects, and identified those materials that were already available versus those that would need to be acquired. Students wrote local businesses to donate supplies for the park clean up. Additionally, the students worked with partner organizations to create anti-vandalism signs that would be erected around the park. On the day of the event, the students formed groups, accompanied by a partner or teacher facilitator. Each group was responsible for a particular cleanup duty, was assigned a portion of the volunteers, and directed the clean up efforts.

Reflection:

Reflection activities were embedded throughout the project. Following each phase of the project, students were instructed to write in their journals about what they had done. After meeting with the various partners, students reflected on the role of the partner in society, and how he/she was related to the problem being addressed. After researching aspects of vandalism, students completed brief essays in which they were prompted to place the issues being addressed in the park within the larger societal context. Students were also asked to reflect on 'why' a person might choose to vandalize a park, and then led through a group discussion in which they shared their thoughts. At the culmination of the project, students wrote about career opportunities they had been introduced to that they did not know about previously. Another reflection activity included having the students discuss the degree to which they feel responsible for taking care of their parks and open spaces.

Demonstration/ Celebration:

As part of the 'clean-up the park day,' students took pictures, documenting the state of the park before and after the event. The students worked in their classroom to create a brochure about curbing vandalism that summarized the research that had previously been presented, and illustrated the success of their volunteer day. These brochures were distributed to schools, state agencies, service groups, and parks and recreation departments around the state.

Students also demonstrated their learning through the various presentations and research summaries that they prepared.

As a culminating activity, partners and parents were invited to the school. The students again presented the results of their research and their successes with the 'clean-up the park day.' A law enforcement official and a representative from the community's parks and recreation department gave the students commendations for their work.

Service-Learning Standards:

Duration and Intensity

Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning experiences include the processes of investigation of community needs, preparation for service, action, reflection, demonstration of learning and impacts, and celebration.
2. Service-learning is conducted during concentrated blocks of time across a period of several weeks or months.
3. Service-learning provides enough time to address identified community needs and achieve learning outcomes.

This service learning project spanned an academic semester, and included significant in-class and out-of-class work. Students investigated the needs of the park, researched issues and possible solutions, organized an educational campaign and volunteer clean-up day at the park, and distributed an informational brochure.

Link to Curriculum

Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning has clearly articulated learning goals.
2. Service-learning is explicitly aligned with the academic and/or programmatic curriculum.
3. Service-learning helps participants learn how to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another.
4. Service-learning that takes place in schools is formally recognized in School Board policies and in student records.

This service-learning project was used to teach students about the history of the EPA, the national parks movement, and the role of the parks and recreation departments, the forestry service, law enforcement, and local government agencies in our society.

Students gained research skills, writing and communication skills, math skills in researching and compiling park data and national crime statistics, and leadership skills.

Students obtained information from their own research and from partners, synthesized the information, and then presented it to the community in a variety of formats.

Partnerships

Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning involves a variety of partners, including youth, educators, families, community members, community-based organizations, and/or businesses.
2. Service-learning partnerships are characterized by frequent and regular communication to keep all partners well-informed about activities and progress.
3. Service-learning partners collaborate to establish a shared vision and set common goals to address community needs.
4. Service-learning partners collaboratively develop and implement action plans to meet specified goals.
5. Service-learning partners share knowledge and understanding of school and community assets and needs and view each other as valued resources.

Students worked closely with the community partners to identify the needs of the park, obtained information regarding how to address the park's needs, and learned about vandalism. Students collaborated with community partners to create a strategy to address the park's needs and to organize the clean-up day. Students communicated regularly with park and law enforcement officials to strategize and implement each step of the service-learning project.

Meaningful Service

Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning experiences are appropriate to participant ages and developmental abilities.
2. Service-learning addresses issues that are personally relevant to the participants.
Service-learning provides participants with interesting and engaging service activities.
3. Service-learning encourages participants to understand their service experiences in the context of the underlying societal issues being addressed.
4. Service-learning leads to attainable and visible outcomes that are valued by those being served.

Students were responsible for researching the park's needs and deciding upon the specific issue to address. Students decided upon vandalism because many of them had visited the park and were personally affected by its state. All of the students were very excited about their project, and the teacher and partners had to help make sure that their goals were realistic and attainable.

Several reflection and classroom activities specifically had the students place the service-learning project within a larger societal context. Students learned about the local neighborhood to place the project within the local context. Additionally, students learned about the societal role of many of the partners, and researched trends and causes of vandalism and crime at the national level.

The service-learning project resulted in a successful educational campaign and significant improvement to the state of the park. The parents and community members that volunteered at the park expressed their satisfaction with the project.

Youth Voice

Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning engages youth in generating ideas during the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.
2. Service-learning involves youth in the decision-making process throughout the service-learning experiences.
3. Service-learning involves youth and adults in creating an environment that supports trust and open expression of ideas.
4. Service-learning promotes acquisition of knowledge and skills to enhance youth leadership and decision-making.
5. Service-learning involves youth in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning experience.

Students made decisions throughout every phase of the project. Students openly discussed project options among themselves and with partners, and made decision throughout every phase of the project. Students took leadership roles in deciding how to implement the project, organized the different pieces of the project, and facilitated the different volunteer groups during the clean-up day. Student were also involved in the evaluation of research summaries and recruiting presentations.

Diversity

Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

Indicators

1. Service-learning helps participants identify and analyze different points of view to gain understanding of multiple perspectives.

2. Service-learning helps participants develop interpersonal skills in conflict resolution and group decision-making.
3. Service-learning helps participants actively seek to understand and value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving service.
4. Service-learning encourages participants to recognize and overcome stereotypes.

Some classroom activities had student identify and reflect on societal causes of vandalism and crime. In researching the needs of the park, students learned about the role the park plays within its surrounding neighborhood, and the various views community members had about its role and importance. Students were required to discuss their opinions regarding the project and come to decisions as a group. Through discussions and research, students were prompted to understand the views of those from different backgrounds, and to understand the causes of crime without stereotyping the offender.

Reflection

Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning reflection includes a variety of verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities to demonstrate understanding and changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes.
2. Service-learning reflection occurs before, during, and after the service experience.
3. Service-learning reflection prompts participants to think deeply about complex community problems and alternative solutions.
4. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine their preconceptions and assumptions in order to explore and understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens.
5. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine a variety of social and civic issues related to their service-learning experience to understand connections to public policy and civic life.

This should be covered in the project description.

Progress Monitoring

Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

Indicators:

1. Service-learning participants collect evidence of progress toward meeting specific service goals and learning outcomes from multiple sources throughout the service-learning experience.

2. Service-learning participants collect evidence of the quality of service-learning implementation from multiple sources throughout the service-learning experience.
3. Service-learning participants use evidence to improve service-learning experiences.
4. Service-learning participants communicate evidence of progress toward goals and outcomes with the broader community, including policymakers and education leaders, to deepen service-learning understanding and ensure that high quality practices are sustained.

Students regularly reflected on the roles and purposes of the partners, the specific needs of the park and the surrounding community, and the history of the EPA, the national parks movement, and the historical trends of vandalism and other crimes. Unit quizzes, tests, and reflection essays were used to assess specific learning outcomes. Student assessments were made of the research summaries and educational presentations. Students communicated the results of their work to governmental agencies and educational leaders through the brochure that was distributed.