

Using newspapers and
PROJECT  **Citizen**

Student Worksheets

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Identifying Problems

Every community, no matter how good, faces problems that might require public policy solutions. From providing safe, clean schools that offer a quality education to all students to protecting the rights of its individual citizens, communities and states use their laws, rules and regulations to help solve these types of issues.

Through your own personal experiences, you may know about a local problem. Or, you might not be aware that there are issues causing your parents and your neighbors concern. Either way, it's important to identify the problems, judge their importance, and investigate possible causes in order to start dealing with them.

Public Policy - A concept or set of ideas that guides a course of action or a procedure used in dealing with public issues or problems. Public policies are embodied in laws, rules or regulations or agreed upon procedures used by government to protect the rights of the people and to promote the general welfare.

Rank	Problem/Issue	Possible Causes

Newspaper Activity:

In small groups, look through several editions of the local newspaper for articles about problems or concerns in your community. Try ranking them by importance; identify what people or stakeholders are affected by the situation. Do the articles provide information about the possible causes for these problems? If not, where might you find more details about these issues? As a class, select one problem that is important to you and your community and one you might actually be able to resolve by proposing public policy.

Gathering Information

Once you've selected one problem to focus on, it is important to gather information from a number of reliable sources to gain a deeper understanding of it. When comparing information from different sources, some will be more accurate and non-biased than others. Different sources may take different, even opposing positions depending on the point-of-view being expressed.

Sources of information might include: Libraries, Newspapers, the Internet, Professors and Scholars, Lawyers and Judges, Community Organizations, Legislative and Administrative Government Offices.

Reliable - *adjective*
- Dependable in achievement, accuracy, honesty, etc.: reliable information.

Newspaper Activities:

- ♦ Look through the newspapers and collect any articles that relate to the issue you've decided to focus on. Remember, the clippings might include news articles, editorials, letters to the editor or even political cartoons. Be sure to include information about current and/or proposed policies aimed at solving the problem.
- ♦ After reading the newspaper materials, write down any questions you still have on the topic. Using other sources, research the answers to your questions.

Information Source	Point of View

Remaining questions _____

Looking for Possible Solutions

Solution - *noun* -
 The method or process of solving a problem.
 The answer to or disposition of a problem.

Now that you've done research and have a better understanding of the problem and who is affected, it's time to consider the best possible solution. As a group, the class should review all the gathered information and brainstorm a solution. Draft a specific public policy proposal that puts into words the idea your class decides on and is willing to support.

Be sure that your policy is practical and realistic and can be supported by facts. It can not violate existing state or national law. Your class may want to reference your state and U.S. Constitutions.

Newspaper Activity:

- ♦ Look through several editions of the local newspaper for articles that explain a potential solution to a problem. Is the solution good in the short-term or long term? What are some obstacles that might hinder or stop a solution to the problem? Does the solution involve public policy, private action or a combination? (Example: Pollution - a law requiring recycling of all plastic products, individuals collecting plastic containers and finding ways to reuse or recycle.)

In the space below write out and organize potential solutions to the problem/issue the class has decided to work on. Consider whether they will work short or long term or both. Jot down potential drawbacks.

Possible solution	Short term	Long term	Possible obstacles
Recycling of plastic products	x	x	People are in the habit of throwing plastic away. Passing and enforcing a law may be very difficult.

Draft a rough public policy statement for the class's solution: _____

Persuading Others

In order to get public policy changed or adopted, it's necessary to gain support from individuals, groups and government officials. The newspaper contains many examples of persuasive writing. Advertisements are written to persuade you to buy a product or service. However, the persuasive writing meant to affect the public good can be found in the editorial pages of the newspaper. A good editorial establishes a position, reviews opposing thoughts, and supports its conclusion with supporting details. It often gives the reader a specific "call to action." Opinion columnists, cartoonists and letters to the editor are other examples of persuasive expression.

Persuade - verb
Win approval or support for.
Cause somebody to adopt a certain position, belief, or course of action; convince.

Newspaper Activity:

Our nation's founders realized someone needed to hold the government accountable for its actions. The First Amendment, freedom of the press, ensures that newspapers and other media continue to serve as the "public's watchdog." Publishing information and commentary on controversial topics are two ways newspapers exercise this responsibility.

◆ Look through editions of the newspaper for editorials. Note how these persuasive pieces use facts to support their opinion. Use these editorials as a model for the arguments you can use to gain support for your proposed public policy.

In the grid below, organize the facts you've found about your problem/issue. Be sure to include the points that support the opposing point of view. By knowing and understanding the opposition's argument, you can strengthen your own position.

SUPPORTING FACTS	
PROS	CONS

On the back of this sheet write a draft of a newspaper editorial or draw an editorial cartoon that clearly argues your solution to the problem.

Making an Effective Presentation

Present - verb -
To bring before or
introduce to the public;
offer for consideration.
To show or exhibit.

The last step in this process may seem the easiest to some and impossible to others. You and your classmates are now experts on the problem you've selected and know the public policy you think is best. You've worked on your persuasive arguments. Now you just have to present your ideas to other people.

To communicate effectively, you must state your facts in a simple, concise and interesting manner.

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Look through several editions of the newspaper. Find a few examples of page layouts that grabbed your attention. Collect several and try to determine the common elements that made these pages work. Is it the use of color, a great headline, a compelling image, an interesting chart or graph? How does the layout use white space? Choose one and describe why it effectively communicates to your class.
- ◆ Organize your work and create a final newspaper "front page" to report the problem, current policy, your proposed policy and action plan to get the policy adopted. Be creative.

Layout tips:

- ◆ Use only one main "headline" to make your point in as few words as possible. Other important information could be summarized using subheads.
- ◆ Try to limit the use of type fonts to a select few. If you use too many your message may get lost.
- ◆ Try to limit the use of artwork or photos to one or two more powerful images.
- ◆ Remember to include a "call to action message." Once you educate the reader about the problem and your solution, remember to tell them what they can DO about it.
- ◆ Sketch out several small versions to test different layouts to help you decide on a final version.

Use the back of this page or a separate piece of paper to complete your "front page" layout. This exercise could also be done on a computer if equipment is available and time permits.

As a class review everyone's layout and select one or two of the best. Why were they selected? What makes them work better than some of the others?

If you've enjoyed this series and investigating solutions to local issues, you might want to get more involved with **Project Citizen**. For more information go to www.civiced.org.