

Understanding Our Values: A Lesson Plan

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Helping learners realize that alternatives exist to their current ways of living in the world is a central activity to critical thinking. The realization that an unsatisfactory situation is not as fixed as had previously been thought gives one the openness to imagine systems that are more meaningful. For example, if we find ourselves in social, political, or economic arrangements that are oppressive, we can envision just alternatives. Civics education should stimulate people's imaginations to create change, rather than ask them to fit in an unjust system.

Since traditional civics education curricula focus on *how* learners ought to engage with government while saying nothing about *why* they should engage in such action, this lesson will provide learners the opportunity to explore their political and moral values.

Moreover, because it is hard for learners to imagine alternatives when they are constantly taught to think within a particular paradigm, this lesson will promote a language of possibility.

In this lesson, learners will articulate through pictures, skits, and writing how they would envision democracy in their communities by reflecting on the values important to them.

Activities

1. Brainstorm the question, "What are values?" and record the answers on flipchart paper.
2. Have learners get into small groups or pairs to share the values important to them.
3. Give learners index cards and ask them to write their top ten values on each card. As a way to spark discussion among partners, ask learners to prioritize these values.
4. Visioning: Ask learners to work individually or in groups to create a picture or skit that responds to the following question:
If you could imagine democracy in your community, what would it look like? Remind learners to incorporate their values into their creation in some way.
5. When learners are finished, ask them to hang their visions around the room. Suggest that learners do a "gallery walk" so that they can interact with one another and ask questions.
6. After the gallery walk, ask each learner to discuss their creation. When all learners have presented their visions, have them comment on similarities and differences.
7. Compare these creations hung on the wall with students' assumptions about the meanings of democracy. Are there any changes in opinions, values, or assumptions? Will these changes affect the way learners see themselves as citizens in the world?
8. Now that learners have had an opportunity to share ideas, ask them to write a five-paragraph essay incorporating their own ideas from their skit or drawing and the ideas from their classmates answering the same question that served as the basis for their drawing or skit:
If you could imagine democracy in your community, what would it look like?

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