NC Civic Education Consortium
Program in the Humanities and Human Values

Exploring Community Responsibility:
The Web of My Community

Overview

Part of being an active, responsible citizen within the community is recognizing that each individual's actions affect the community as a whole. Thus, citizens who are active and engaged have a positive effect on those around them and those who are apathetic have a negative effect. In this activity, students create a "web" to explore the interconnectedness of citizens living within the same community.

Grades

Any

Activity Type

Whole group/class

Materials

Yarn

Duration

30 minutes

Procedure

1. Have all students stand in a circle and read the following:

   "I want you to close your eyes and imagine where you live. Think about the things you love most about it. Think about the things you pass by everyday on your way to school or work that you glance at or hear in passing… The huge oak tree; the park; the sound of swing sets and the ice cream truck; a field of corn; old folks sitting on the porch of the retirement center, giving a little wave as you cruise by; the flowers outside of your school, bright flashes poking up from thick piles of dark brown mulch; the flag on top of the courthouse, flapping against a blue sky; your own home; the sound of dishes being washed; the smell of cut grass; your own room; your favorite snacks in the cabinets; your favorite CDs in the stereo; your favorite posters and pictures on the wall…

   And then, imagine it all gone.

   This is exactly what happened in 1996, when Hurricane Fran charged though North Carolina slapping our state with 115 mph winds and dumping as much as 10 inches of rain. It roared and ripped and screamed through counties and towns, cities and fields. And when it was finished, it left behind broken homes…broken trees…and broken hearts.

Water rose through homes, traveled through the ducts, soaked into the wood, stained the furniture and clothes, disintegrated pictures, and washed away symbols of memories. Fields remained where there were once neighborhoods. Crops were destroyed. Schools were ruined. Libraries were left with nothing more than wet, pulpy piles of paper that used to be books. Pets were missing. Trees were bent over, ripped by the roots from the ground. Citizens and police and firefighters were left sad eyed and exhausted.

And so, how does a community pull itself up from such devastation? How does it make it through the days and weeks with no power, no running water, no food. How does it build itself back, return to a normal day of school or work or life in general? What does it take to start from debris and heal those broken homes, broken trees, and broken hearts?

I want each of you to imagine that this is your community, or the community in the county right next to yours. What could you do or encourage others to help you do, to help a process of healing begin after the cold, wet fist of a hurricane has done its damage?

Think of something specific, great or small, that you could do to help this community."

2. Give students a few moments to think and then explain that you will start. Share your idea, such as "I would organize a book drive, where I encouraged people around the state to send their favorite books so that we could restock the library" or "I would make cards for people who had lost something in the hurricane, just so they would know someone was thinking of them," then holding the end of the yarn and unraveling some of its length, throw it to someone else in the circle. Explain that once students receive the yarn, they will hold onto a piece, pull it tight, and share their own idea of how they could help. They will then repeat the process, holding their piece, unraveling it a bit, and throwing it to another person across the circle, who will then share their idea. As this process continues, a web will start to form in the middle of the circle. Remind students it is very important they hold on to their piece. As students participate, if they get stuck and cannot think of something, they can add to an idea that has already been shared. For example, "I really liked Christie's idea about the book drive. I would contact businesses outside of NC and see if they would donate books also."

3. Once all students are finished, have them look at the web they created. Ask them:
    *   What do you notice about this web that we have created? (You are looking for a student to point out that they are all part of it; they are all holding it together; they are connected; etc. The facilitator may also want to tug on the yarn during this part of the discussion and ask who in the web felt it. Discuss what this can symbolize.)
    *   What has connected us all in this web? What difference would our web have made in the community that was suffering from so much loss?
    *   Can one person make a difference? Explain. Let's say I wouldn't have started that book drive. Would it have really mattered?

4. As students discuss whether or not the actions of one person can make a difference, drop your hold on the yarn, which will create a difference in the look of the web. Discuss:
   - What just happened? How did my letting go affect the web?
   - Symbolically, how might just one person not helping their community affect the entire community?
   - As citizens of a community, what are our responsibilities to each other and the community at large?

Culminating Activities
- Have students design bumper stickers that encourage helping others, generosity, volunteering, or other themes brought up throughout the web activity.
- Do this activity by describing an actual problem in your community; once students brainstorm ways they can contribute and assist, have them put those ideas into action and volunteer