



Planning for Service Learning Example: *Middle School, Immigrants*

Grade level(s): 6-7

Essential Purpose or Question:

Can student learning move from simulation to making a real community impact?

Content—Learning About:

- Immigration to the United States
- Process of becoming a citizen
- Resettlement of refugees
- Civic involvement

Service Need:

Becoming a U.S. citizen requires dedication and hard work that deserves to be honored by the community, which can increase tolerance and understanding between cultures.

Service Idea: In Honor of New Citizens

Sponsor a citizenship swearing-in ceremony at school.

Investigation of the Need:

Interview an official from Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to find out about the need for swearing-in ceremonies and community involvement.

Preparation and Planning:

Meet with INS, read about the countries of origin of the people being sworn in, plan the event, get food donations, decorate auditorium and library, arrange for coverage by educational television channel.

Action:

Set up rooms, greet guests, interview the new citizens, and take photographs.

Reflection Methods:

Write in journals, lead discussion groups, identify needs for written materials and resources for children of these families, write a letter to INS to share what has been learned and suggest ideas for next time, send forms to partner agencies for feedback, read and share letters received from new citizen families expressing thanks for the special event.

Demonstration to Others:

Compile interviews and photographs for each family, and make “welcome kits” for the children of these families with: a cartoon-style area map, recommended places for sports and entertainment, a list of after-school and weekend activities, a guide of youth idioms, a small journal, and a pen.

Youth Voice and Choice:

Develop the idea, establish partnerships, organize into committees, plan interviews, design and make welcome kits for children of families.

Curricular Connections:

English/Language Arts:

Write letters for donations and thank-you letters, keep journals, read literature about the immigrant experience, write press releases, learn new vocabulary

Social Studies/History:

Participate in an Ellis Island simulation; hear guest speaker from INS; research the countries of origin of the people being sworn in—their history, current events, and culture (foods, music, traditions); interview immigrants about their transition to citizenship

Mathematics:

Science:

Languages:

Identify greetings in the languages of the countries studied, including the correct pronunciations; use the greetings on banners

Art and Music:

Collect music from many cultures; school choral group participates by singing a medley with cultural references

Technology:

Other:

Skills Being Developed:

- Organization and planning
- Letter writing
- Interviewing
- Problem solving
- Teamwork

Books and Other Media Used:

The Skirt

The Circuit and Breaking Through

The Middle of Everywhere: The World’s Refugees Come to Our Town (excerpts)

Behind the Mountains

The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee’s Story

The Kid’s Guide to Social Action

Immigration: How Should It Be Controlled?

A Very Important Day

Community Partners:

Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS)

City multicultural program

Educational TV channel

Portland Press



Opportunities for Students to:

- **Experience and explore diversity:**

Students researched the immigrants' countries of origin as they were making plans for the swearing-in ceremony. They held discussions about the many different reasons people immigrate to the United States, and the specific circumstances related to people seeking refugee status. They saw the differences in needs from one generation to the next.

- **Participate in progress monitoring:**

N/A

- **Learn about careers:**

Students learned about careers in government and nonprofit organizations related to refugee assistance, both national and international.

- **Strengthen social-emotional and character traits:**

Students replaced stereotypes with accurate information about people within their community. They also gained empathy, compassion, and open-mindedness.

- **Make global connections:**

Students increased their knowledge of why people immigrate and gained awareness of contemporary global issues in many parts of the world.

- **Develop leadership:**

This experience presented a tremendous opportunity for youth initiative and creativity. Students had fun learning about other cultures and creating a welcoming environment. They showed initiative in their studies and showed exemplary leadership in making complex issues easier for their peers to understand.

Duration of the Service Learning Experience (approximate timeframe):

Roughly two to three months, with more time spent at the beginning and right before the event. This service experience has been adopted by each class for several years.

Teacher Collaboration:

Teachers school-wide saw the value to their classes and to the entire community and collaborated by allowing release time from class as the event neared. Many classes generously participated by making posters and decorations, helping with translations, and reading relevant literature to become well-versed on the topic.

Public Awareness or Presentations Planned (including media, alerting public officials, recognition, and celebrations):

Students sought donations from the community and educated local businesses about their work and about the need being addressed. Students wrote press releases and invited media to attend the swearing-in ceremony. Students also invited local elected officials and school board members. The event closed with a celebration for the new citizens.

Tangible Product(s) from the Experience:

Welcome kit prototype, area maps, lists of community information

Additional Notes:

This service learning experience took place at Lyman Moore Middle School in Portland, Maine. It evolved from student interest and initiative resulting from an Ellis Island simulation, which taught them more about their community as a resettlement area for people from all over the world. Partnerships with INS and city offices were essential components.