

MHCC Unit #1

Inquiry

Carolyn Bolthouse, Comstock Park High School
Comstock Park Public Schools

Grade Level: High School

Abstract: TLW identify and discuss public policy issues, selecting one issue to pursue for further research and development.

Primary Standards and Benchmarks addressed:

Standard V.1HS 3

Standard V.2HS 1

Standard V.2HS 2

Standard VI.1HS 1

Estimated time to complete all components of lesson: 4 class periods of approximately 50-55 minutes

*Additional time may need to be allotted for the design, conducting, and compilation of community survey data.

Materials needed:

- computer Access to Microsoft Excel or Poster programs
- marker materials
- transparency film (may make transparencies of resources)
- newspaper clippings of state and local govt. public policy issues

Procedure:

Day 1:

The teacher will introduce the concept of an issue of public policy at the state or local level of government. One way to do this may be through the clipping of articles from a local newspaper that can be copied for students or placed on overhead transparencies. Yet another way to do this may be through student-produced news articles located on the Highestwire website at www.highestwire.org. Through discussion of some of the selected articles, the teacher may want to assist students with the placing of each issue/topic under an appropriate category as categories are listed on the board. Students may also wish to replicate the chart in their notes. (Possible classification categories are listed below)

- *Education
- *Crime
- *Social Problems
- *Economy
- *Health and Safety
- *Other
- *Urban Decay
- *Environment
- *Political/Legal Issues
- *Recreation
- *Inter-community relations

If each category does not have a current example from the newspaper, ask students to brainstorm possible issues that might be prevalent for each category.

After a thorough list of possible public policy issues has been created, ask students to individually record what they think are the four most prevalent issues in their community. Download #1: ***Selection of an Issue*** provides a worksheet that students can use to assist with the selection of their top four public policy issues.

Day 2:

Using download #1: ***Selection of an Issue***, the teacher will ask students to narrow down the number of issues to four by having all the students indicate (by a show of hands) which four issues they had individually selected. (*this number can vary according to teacher discretion.)

Once the top four issues have been selected by the class, the teacher will facilitate discussion about those issues. The teacher will explain to the class that through discussion, the top four issues will be narrowed to one. (If the class is divided between 2 issues, the teacher may decide to allow the students to work in two separate groups to investigate each issue.) As discussion begins, the teacher might ask students, “What problem (s) may have led to or surround your issue?” Each student should identify at least one issue that is most important for the class to pursue. When participating in group discussion students will need to:

- ✓ Make relevant statements throughout the discussion.
- ✓ Apply core democratic values to issues under discussion.
- ✓ Respond appropriately to the contributions made by others.
- ✓ Ask in-depth questions to keep others focused

(See download #2 for ***Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide, Holistic Features Scoring Guide, Group Discussion Scoring Table*** to assist with the grading of the group discussion.)

Based upon the results of group discussion, a public policy issue for further investigation will be selected. (Ultimately if group consensus is not reached automatically, a vote may need to be cast by class members to determine the most important issue.)

Day 3

Now that the students have identified an important public policy issue, the teacher will assist students with the development of a plan to investigate the issue further. Through a class discussion students should answer the following questions with regard to their selected public policy issue:

- Severity of the problem: Has it existed a long time? What have been the effects of the problem? Who does it affect the most? Can the problem continue the way it is?
- Causes of the problem: What factors might have caused this problem? Is this problem the result of another pre-existent problem?
- Relatedness: Is this problem related to any others in the community? If so, how has that happened and why?
- Current action: Is anyone or any group of people currently doing anything to address this problem? Are there other communities that are encountering the same problem or a similar problem?
- Debate: Are there any conflicting ideas or ongoing debates with regard to the problem?
- Community involvement: What do the people in the community think about the problem? Do they have suggestions as to how to solve the problem?

After the above key questions have been answered, students may decide to survey their community with regard to their selected issue. If this is done, download #3: ***Four Steps to Successful Surveying*** can help students develop a community survey to determine community input with regard to the selected issue. Class time must be allotted to develop a community survey. (Approximated time for this task: 1-2 days to construct the survey, 1 week for the collection of the survey, and 1-2 class periods to compile the results.)

If a survey is conducted, the teacher may wish to encourage student reflection through a journal entry assignment. Download #4: ***Journal Entry Survey Reflection and Holistic Scoring Guide*** can be used to encourage student reflection through a journal entry.

Day 4

If students are to thoroughly examine an issue of public policy, they will need to determine which communities/stakeholders their selected issue affects. Utilizing Power Mapping strategies found on the Public Achievement web site ([http://www. publicachievement.org](http://www.publicachievement.org)), the teacher will write the selected issue in the middle of a large piece of paper, an overhead transparency, or a board. Students will brainstorm all of the people and organizations that might have a stake in the issue and place their names on spokes stemming from the central issue. Either as a class or in small groups, students will identify the interests and power of each of the stakeholders. (Stakeholders to look for might include the following:)

- Government
- Media
- Business
- Non-profit organizations

Once all stakeholders have been established, students will need to decide how to gather the required information from each entity. Three basic questions that all entities might be asked might be:

- ❖ “What is currently being done with regard to the problem?”
- ❖ “Are there any proposals or plans for taking care of the problem?”
- ❖ “Who, if anyone, is working on the problem or is interested in it?”

The teacher will assist students with information gathering assignments and deadlines.

Once students have thoroughly researched each institution’s response to the public policy issue, they will need to evaluate current courses of action. Download #5: ***Key Questions when Evaluating Public Policy*** will assist students with evaluating public policy regarding their researched issue.

After students have evaluated public policy with regard to their researched issue, the teacher will assist students as they develop generalizations

pertaining to the specific issue. Student produced generalizations can be used as a basis for public discourse and decision making in Unit #2 and eventual citizen involvement in Unit #3.

Assessment: Using gathered research, students will reflect upon the evaluative process of an issue of public policy through a journal entry. See download #6: *Public Policy Reflection*.

Web sites:

Michigan Legislature: This site provides information on all pieces of State legislation as well as a listing of State Representatives, a calendar of legislative events, and an on-line version of the publication, *A Citizen's Guide to State Government*. www.house.mi.gov/citizen.asp.

Michigan Youth Caucus: This interactive web site for high school students provides them an opportunity to debate issues important to Michigan's youth online with peers across the state. It may also be used as a resource for issue topics: www.michiganyouthcaucus.org

The Civics Institute (formerly, Michigan Civics Institute): This web site is a great free resource of local and state of Michigan government lessons for secondary teachers to use. It could be helpful for preparing students to present to the Michigan House Civics Commission: www.civicsinstitute.net or www.civicsinstitute.com

Highestwire: This web site is an online news service for young people between the ages of 15-22. It can be used to generate possible topics for issues: <http://highestwire.com/>

Public Achievement: This organization's web site provides tools for getting students actively involved in civics projects: http://www.publicachievement.org/5_resources.html

Active Citizenship Today: This section of the Close Up Foundation's web site provides ordering information for their Active Citizenship Today Field Guide: <http://www.closeup.org/cgi/pubs/pubs.pl?action=media&type=1&id=11210318485852>

ISSUE SELECTION

You have engaged in discussion with your peers about several issues of public policy. You will now reflect upon the many issues that have been discussed to arrive at your own prioritized list of issues of most importance. Answer the questions that follow to help organize your thinking and determine your ideas as to the issues of primary importance.

Step 1: List the top four issues that you think are the most important to your local community.

Step 2: Of the four top issues that you think are the most important, answer the following questions below.....

- Which issues have an impact on your life?
- Which issues affect your community the most?
- Which issues are the most pressing?
- Which issues do you think would be the most interesting to work on?
- Which issues could affect you personally, the most?
- Which issues could be worked on most easily?
- Which issues would you learn the most from?

Step 3: Obtain some perspective from at least 2 other people whose opinions you respect. Ask them what issues they feel are the most important in the community and why. List their comments below....

Step 4: Be reflective. Think about your class discussion as well as the comments that you have received from others with regard to important community issues. Have you changed your ranking of top issues? Why or why not? Were there important comments made by others that you had not realized when comprising your own list?

Step 5: Prepare your list of issues for class discussion. Once your final list has been comprised think about the following questions:

- **How will I be able to defend my list? What reasoned arguments can I make to justify my placement of issues?**
- **How does my list of most important issues relate to certain core democratic values? Am I considering the common good of my community or are there issues surrounding individual rights that may be in conflict?**
- **Thinking alternatively, if one of my issues is called into question by a classmate, how might I defend an alternative viewpoint?**
- **How can I ask questions of my classmates to require them to focus on these top issues of importance?**

***Jotting down a few notes in preparation for class discussion may help you stay on task during the discussion. It is important during class discussion to state your points completely but succinctly.**

CLASSROOM ANALYTIC SCORING GUIDE

| Standard: VI.2 | | Group Discussion | | Later Elementary | |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| | Made a relevant statement | Applied core democratic values | Responded appropriately | Asked a pertinent question | |
| Performance Level 4 | Participated in the discussion by making many highly relevant, insightful, and complex statements throughout the discussion | Demonstrates an understanding of the competing core democratic values relevant to the issue under discussion. | Responded appropriately at all times and made a concerted effort to invite and acknowledge the contributions of others. | Asked in-depth questions that led others to think about different views directly related to the issue being discussed. | |
| Performance Level 3 | Participated in discussion by making relevant statements | Correctly applies at least one appropriate core democratic value to support their position on the issue. | Responded appropriately at all times. | Asked relevant questions that kept others on topic. | |
| Performance Level 2 | Participated in discussion but statements were only marginally relevant | Student alludes to a core democratic value but does not make a clear connection to their position | Responded inappropriately but made some appropriate comments. | Questions posed were either marginally relevant or inappropriate. | |
| Performance Level 1 | Did not make any relevant statements during the discussion | Student makes no reference to core democratic values, <u>OR</u> the value cited has no apparent connection to the issue under discussion | Responded inappropriately and made no appropriate comments <u>OR</u> did not take part in the discussion | Asked no questions <u>OR</u> the questions were irrelevant. | |

The student is responding **appropriately** when he/she exhibits one or more of the following behaviors:

- Invites the contributions of others
- Acknowledges the statements of others
- Challenges the accuracy, logic, relevance, or clarity of statements made by others
- Summarizes points of agreement and disagreement

The student is responding **inappropriately** when he/she exhibits one or more of the following behaviors:

- Making irrelevant distracting statements
- Interrupting
- Monopolizing
- Engaging in personal attacks

PLEASE NOTE: Performance Level 3 is the standard. The student is successful and has met the standard when he/she reaches Performance Level 3. Performance Level 4 is included for comparison purposes only.

**HOLISTIC FEATURE SCORING FOR
GROUP DISCUSSION:
GRADES 3-12**

| Points | Description |
|---------------|--|
| 4 | In order to receive a 4-point score, during discussion the student must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of core democratic values • Make at least 2 relevant statements • Respond appropriately at all times • Ask at least 2 pertinent questions |
| 3 | In order to receive a 3-point score, during discussion the student must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of core democratic values • Achieve the performance standard on 2 of the remaining 3 elements |
| 2 | In order to receive a 2-point score, during discussion the student must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve the performance standard on 2 of the remaining 4 elements |
| 1 | In order to receive a 1-point score, during discussion the student must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve the standard on 1 of the remaining 4 elements |
| 0 | In order to receive a 0-point score, the students' discussion will show no evidence of any of the elements associated with this standard. |

PLEASE NOTE: This scoring guide is designed to be used with its corresponding Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide. There are four elements (features) to this task. The four elements are listed in the 4-point score description. To receive credit for the elements listed above, a student must reach or exceed Performance Level 3 (see Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide) for that element.

Question Discussed:

Date: _____

Discussion Time: _____ minutes

Teacher: _____

Students: #1 _____ #2 _____ #3 _____

#4 _____ #5 _____ #6 _____

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6

Student used core democratic values

Student made a statement about the issue that was accurate and relevant

Student asked pertinent questions

Responded Appropriately

**Invited the contributions of others
Acknowledged statements of others
Tactfully challenged the accuracy, logic,**

relevance, or clarity of statements made

**by others
Summarized points of agreement and disagreement**

Responded Inappropriately

Made irrelevant/distracting statements

Interrupted

Monopolized the discussion

Engaged in personal attacks

Rating for Responded Appropriately

FINAL SCORE

FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL SURVEYING

There are 4 steps to successful surveying:

1. Creating the survey.
2. Selecting the sample.
3. Conducting the survey.
4. Tabulating the results of the survey.

1. CREATING THE SURVEY

Tips to keep in mind:

1. Make sure that most of your questions are multiple choice or “yes or no” questions. Too many open-ended questions that require a written response are difficult to score and require too much time for individuals (respondents) to answer. A few open-ended questions will probably need to be asked but construct those questions carefully.
2. Checklists may be a consideration. This is an easy way to ask individuals (respondents) to rank ideas or concerns. Remember: at the conclusion of your survey you may have to select one course of action and ranking by respondents may help you do that.
3. Keep the survey as short and as simple as possible. If questions are hard to understand or require a lot of time to answer, respondents won't take the time to complete the survey.
4. Make sure that your questions are unbiased. Don't lead respondents into marking a certain answer because of the way that your questions are worded. Your research will not be pure and people may doubt your research.
5. Be sure to ask for demographic information that you might need after your results are tabulated. For example, age or gender might be an important way of breaking down results after your survey has been conducted.
6. Avoid embarrassing questions that might cause respondents to become angry or to not complete your survey.
7. Be sure to give your survey a “trial run.” Test your questions on your classmates, parents, or teachers to be sure that they are clear, straightforward, and unbiased.

2. SELECTING THE SAMPLE

It is not necessary to poll everyone in the community to get a clear idea of how people in a community feel about an issue. A representative sample (a smaller selection of individuals who take a survey) can help you gather a good number of individuals representing the different views in your community. Just be sure to consider a way to include:

- People of different age groups
- People who have different living arrangements (those who own their home, those who might rent a home, etc.)
- People who own and run businesses in the community
- Working people, students, and the elderly
- People of various ethnic groups
- Males and females

3. CONDUCTING THE SURVEY

Here are some things to keep in mind when conducting your survey:

- Prepare an introduction that every questioner can use and practice introductions. In your introduction be sure that you:
 1. Introduce yourself.
 2. Explain what school you are from or what group you are representing.
 3. Explain the purpose of the survey.
 4. Inquire as to whether the person would mind spending a few minutes to complete the survey. If the person agrees to do so, ask if they would like to fill out the survey or respond verbally to the survey questions.
- Remember that not everyone will cooperate in taking the survey. Move on to someone who will be willing.
- Keep your survey anonymous. You will get more honest results and respondents will feel less pressure to complete the survey.
- Be organized and have plenty of supplies. (surveys and writing utensils)
- Work together. You will find it easier if you support each other.
- Make sure that each survey is complete before moving on to the next respondent. It's much easier to ask for clarification from that person on the spot than to try and guess a response later on.
- BE POLITE!

4. TABULATING SURVEY RESULTS

Before tabulating your results, be sure to write down how your sample of respondents was chosen. People who are interested in your results will also be interested in knowing this as well.

1. Count the number of completed surveys you have gathered.
2. Use a blank survey form to tabulate your results.
3. Be sure to write down your most significant findings. This might be something that you expected to find or conversely, an unusual comparison or unexpected finding.
4. Decide how to present your data. You may decide to use raw numbers, percentages, pie charts, or bar graphs. Whatever method you choose, be sure to make sure that your data is accurate and is not misrepresented in your survey.
5. Do not drop “unsure” or “no opinion” answers from your reported results as doing so might misrepresent your results.

You have examined one institution's response to an issue or problem. You must now decide whether or not you feel that the public policy designed to address the issue or problem is, or will be, effective. The questions below are constructed to help you determine whether or not the chosen course or action (or in some cases, lack of action) is effective.

Considering the various entities that you have examined with regard to public policy, answer the questions below.

- **What is the goal of the policy? What problem (s) if any, is the policy attempting to address?**
- **Are there good points and bad points to the policy? What are they?**
- **Who supports or supported the policy? Who opposes or opposed it? Why?**
- **What are the causes and effects of the problem? Will the policy effectively address the causes of the problem or possibly alleviate some of the effects?**
- **How likely is the policy to be implemented?**
- **What might be some alternatives to the policy?**

Now that you have answered the above questions you need to draw a conclusion to the effectiveness of the proposed (and possibly implemented) policy. Prepare a statement that addresses the question of effectiveness with regard to the proposed policy. In your statement be sure to include:

- ✓ A clearly stated position.
- ✓ Reference to a core democratic value.
- ✓ Data that you might have gathered to strengthen your statement.
- ✓ Acknowledgement of an alternate course of action and rationale behind the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of that alternate course of action.

Be prepared to share your conclusions with others. This may include:

- Classmates
- Others in your school community
- People in your local community
- Local and/or state policymakers

| |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">JOURNAL ENTRY SURVEY REFLECTION</p> |
|--|

You have now completed the survey process. Think about the steps that you completed to conduct your survey and what your survey helped you learn. In a journal entry, be sure to answer the following questions as you reflect upon the surveying process.

- **What improvements would you now make to your survey and why?**
- *What problems does any survey have to overcome?*
- **How might your survey have been helpful to the individuals who responded?**
- *How might surveying be helpful for a community issue or project?*
- **Do you think that your survey will have any lasting effects on its respondents or the community? If so, what kind of lasting effects will it have?**
- *What effect do you think opinion polls have on decision makers in a community?*

In your answer be sure to:

- Thoroughly answer all questions pertaining to the class-created survey (bolded questions) using specific examples.
- Thoroughly answer all questions pertaining to survey research in general. (italicized questions)
- Utilize data collected from the survey to answer at least 2 of the questions asked.
- Reflect upon what was learned from the survey experience and predict how new knowledge would help with the conducting of a class survey in the future.

HOLISTIC SCORING RUBRIC JOURNAL ENTRY

| Points | Description |
|--------|--|
| 4 | <p>In order to receive a 4-point score, the response must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoroughly answer all questions pertaining to the class-created survey (bolded questions) using specific examples. • Thoroughly answer all questions pertaining to survey research in general. (italicized questions) • Utilize data collected from the survey to answer at least 2 of the questions asked. • Reflect upon what was learned from the survey experience and predict how new knowledge would help with the conducting of a class survey in the future. |
| 3 | <p>In order to receive a 3-point score, the response must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoroughly answer at least 3 questions pertaining to the class-created survey (bolded questions) using specific examples. • Thoroughly answer at least 3 questions pertaining to survey research in general. (italicized questions) • Utilize data collected from the survey to answer at least 1 of the questions asked. • Reflect upon what was learned from the survey experience. |
| 2 | <p>In order to receive a 2-point score, the response must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoroughly answer at least 2 questions pertaining to the class-created survey (bolded questions) using specific examples. • Thoroughly answer at least 2 questions pertaining to survey research in general. (italicized questions) • Contain evidence of 1 of the 2 remaining components |
| 1 | <p>In order to receive a 1-point score, the response must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoroughly answer at least 1 question pertaining to the class-created survey (bolded questions). • Thoroughly answer at least 1 question pertaining to survey research in general. (italicized questions) |