

Character and Citizenship Education: A Class Citizenship Tree for Elementary Students

An Educator's Reference Desk Lesson Plan

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Grade Level(s): 2, 3, 4, 5

Brief Description of the Lesson:

During recent years, American public schools have incorporated lessons on character and citizenship education. "Community service helps students make the leap from character lessons to behavior" (Cohen, 1995). The purpose of this lesson plan is to present to elementary students the characteristics that define a socially healthy citizen. There are two objectives for learners:

- Each student will identify two or three specific actions he or she can accomplish to practice good citizenship
- Each student will verbally contract to accomplish one social health action before the end of the 9-week period.

Background Information for the Teacher:

The purpose of an elementary school character education program is to develop social health traits including citizenship, honesty, respect for others, kindness, cooperation, courtesy, respect for home, school, and community environments, and generosity. Classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and parents can teach young students about the importance of appreciating and helping others and model civic responsibility and public service themselves. This teaching technique was successfully field-tested with a group of second and third graders in a Birmingham-area church school. This lesson can be presented during a 60-minute period.

Concepts Covered in this Lesson:

social health, media literacy, good citizenship and civic responsibilities

Materials or Equipment List:

- * children's book with a strong message of service to others
- * classroom bulletin board with colored paper backing
- * green poster board
- * writing and colored construction paper
- * magazines
- * school glue or tape
- * scissors
- * marking pens or crayons
- * aluminum foil
- * scraps of yarn and ribbon

- * buttons
- * stapler
- * newspaper stories of service to others

Procedures:

On the chalkboard, write the words "citizenship" and "service to others." Define each term. Read a children's book that includes a strong message of service to others, e.g., The Berenstain Bears to the Rescue. Discuss how the main characters in the story demonstrated citizenship behaviors.

Explain to students that they will make a Class Citizenship Tree. Ask two students to draw and cut out a large tree shape using green poster board. Staple this to the classroom bulletin board that has been labeled with the header, "Our Class Citizenship Tree. Write the sentence "I can help others by doing _____" on the chalkboard. Ask students to describe, illustrate, or write a completion to the sentence stem. Describe the analogy of service to others as a gift they can give. Invite students to share their ideas for helping others. List student suggestions. Examples include helping a peer with homework, recycling paper or cans at school, picking up trash on the playground, helping a friend to talk to an adult when angry, donating canned food to a class holiday food drive for needy families, setting the table for dinner, or drawing a get-well card for a sick neighbor.

Refer to the class list of good citizenship behaviors, gifts to be given to others. Each student will select one action that he or she will agree to complete during this 9-week period. Encourage each student to create a "gift" in the format of a greeting card using folded construction paper. Each student will write about, draw, or paste pictures cut out of magazines to illustrate the action he or she has chosen. Offer yarn, markers, crayons, ribbon, foil, buttons, etc. for students' use to decorate the front of their gift cards. Label each gift with the student's name and staple it beneath the Class Citizenship Tree.

Assessment:

Ask students to define the terms "citizenship" and "service to others." Use selected articles from local newspapers to illustrate how people help each other for the benefit of the entire community.; For instance, read a story about a high school peer tutoring program. Remind students of the class gifts to give to others and their individual commitment. Each week, ask students to discuss the results of their citizenship gifts to others.

References:

Berenstain, S., & Berenstain, J. (1983) **The Berenstain Bears to the Rescue**. NY: Random House, Inc.

Cohen, P. (1995, Spring). **The Content of Their Character**. ASCD Curriculum Update.