Spot On Social Studies

Opinions About Community Service

by Jack L. Roberts



Should students be required to participate in community service?

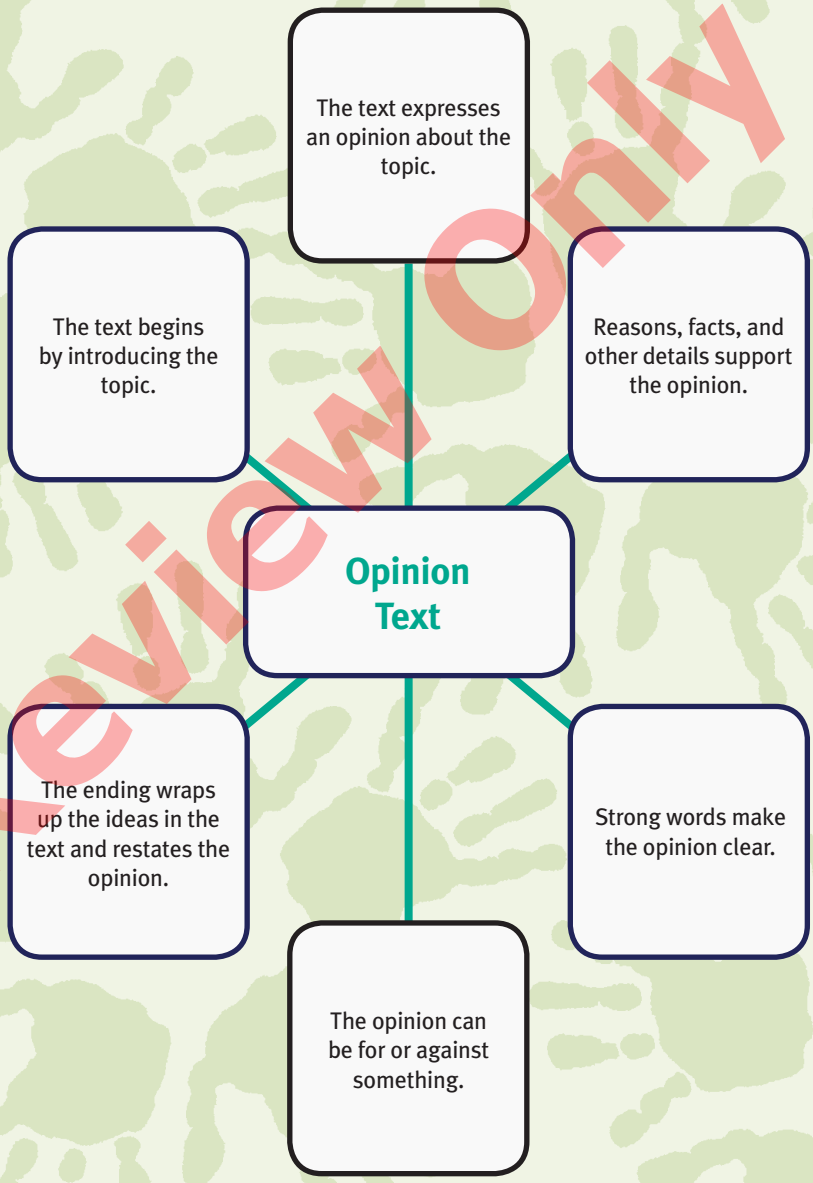
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SOCIAL STUDIES

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Opinion Text

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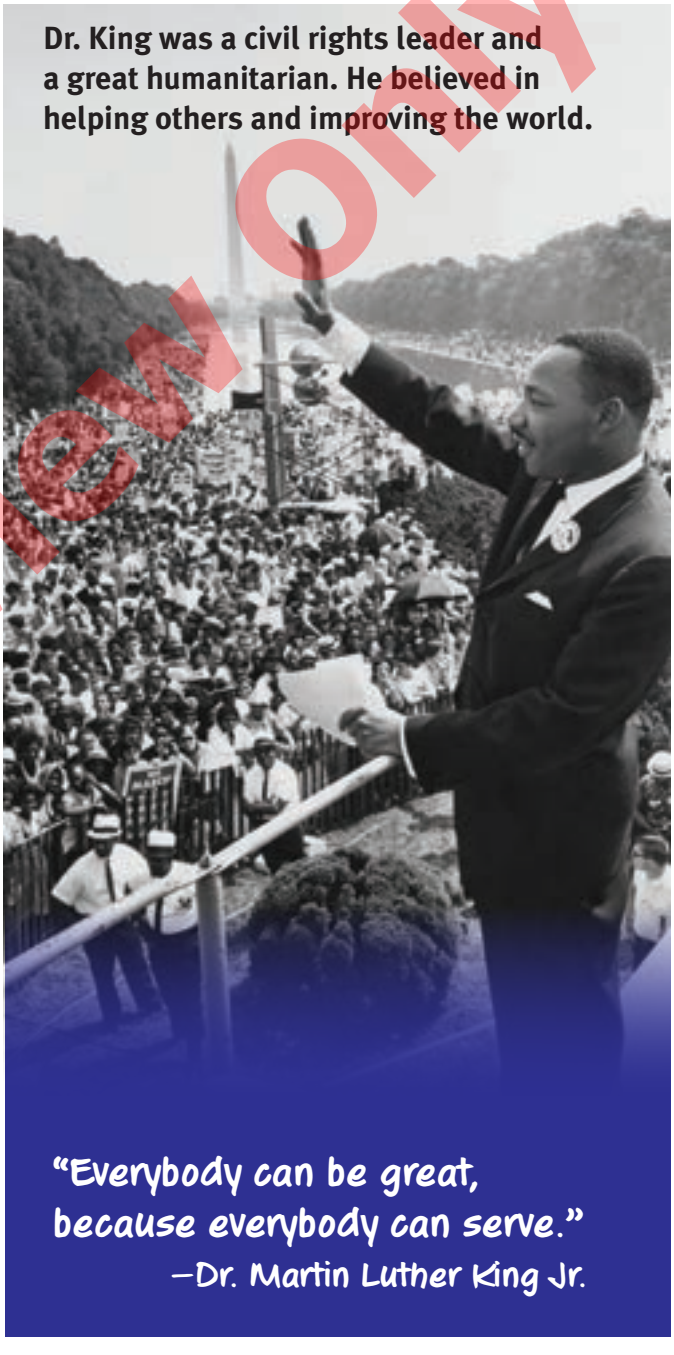
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Giving Back: Community Service

All around the United States, people perform community service. Community service is work that people do to help their community. They do this work without getting paid. The people who **participate** in community service are called **volunteers**—they offer their time and effort for free.

People of all ages volunteer, including kids. A survey by the Corporation for National and Community Service shows that 15.5 million young Americans volunteer, contributing more than 1.3 billion hours of community service each year.

Young people volunteer their time through youth programs and religious organizations. They also participate through their schools. Many schools in the United States try to get students involved in community service. Schools achieve this in a few ways.



Dr. King was a civil rights leader and a great humanitarian. He believed in helping others and improving the world.

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."
—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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Volunteering Activities

There are many ways young people can volunteer in their community.

- help at the local library
- organize activities at a senior center
- paint a mural at a hospital
- clean up litter
- organize food drives for a food bank



Some schools encourage participation in community service by offering something in return. Roughly twenty-three states allow schools to give credit toward graduation for the completion of community service. Schools also offer awards to motivate students. For example, Glendale High School in California encourages community service by giving students a community service award for one hundred hours of service.

Another way to get students involved in community service is to make it a **requirement**. Currently, all high schools in Washington, D.C., require students to complete community service in order to graduate. Many other school districts across the country have a similar requirement.

Community Service in Washington, D.C., Schools

Washington, D.C., was one of the first large city school districts in the United States to require community service to graduate high school. Since 1992, thousands of D.C. students have participated in community service. Students must complete one hundred hours of community service hours outside of school, on their own time. Students can start their community service hours in ninth grade.

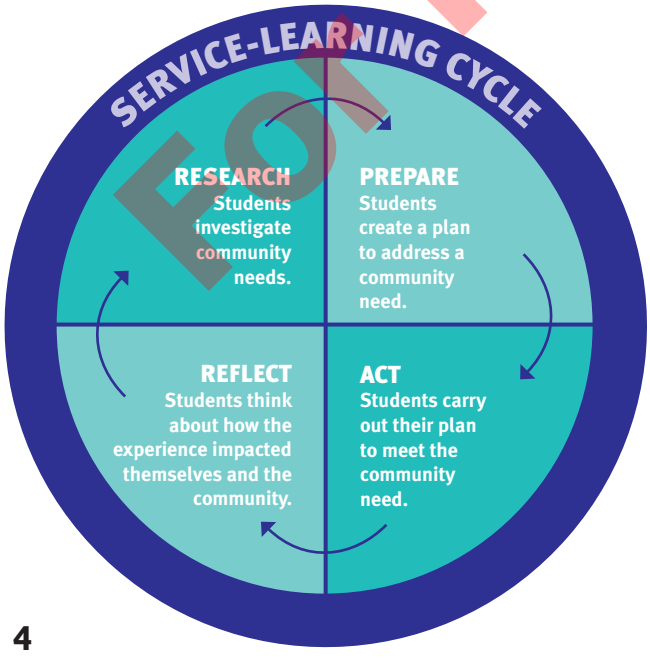
▼ **Picking up litter is one way students volunteer.**



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Service-learning is another option schools have. Service-learning combines classroom instruction with community service. Many schools throughout the United States have service-learning programs. Some schools, such as schools in Maryland, require students to complete service-learning to graduate.

In a service-learning program, students may help identify needs in the community and develop projects to address those needs. For example, third graders in Massachusetts focused on school bus safety for their service-learning project. Over three years, they worked with other students, conducted research and interviews, and presented their ideas to improve school bus safety. By the end of the program, the students reduced problems occurring on buses by 50 percent.



Service-Learning in Maryland Schools

Maryland was the first (and only) state in the country to require students to participate in service-learning as a graduation requirement. Students in Maryland must complete seventy-five hours of service-learning in order to graduate high school. Most of the service-learning hours are completed during school, starting in elementary school. Each graduating class represents about four million hours of service-learning.

▼ **Service-learning includes action that helps the community, such as landscaping to make a neighborhood look nicer.**



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Schools usually require students to complete a minimum amount of volunteer hours. In service-learning programs, young people often complete community service during school hours. In other schools, students must volunteer on their own time. This means that students are responsible for doing the community service after school, on the weekends, or during the summer.

Schools have a greater purpose for encouraging or requiring community service. The aim is for students to learn **civic** responsibility and gain job and life skills. Research shows that community service does help young people in a number of ways. But there are also research findings and strong arguments against requiring or forcing students to perform community service.

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▲ **Students work together to improve school bus safety.**

Positive Impact of Service-Learning with Community Service

Students across the country participate in service-learning programs, which include community service opportunities. There has been a lot of research conducted about the impact of service-learning on students. Studies show that service-learning can have a positive influence on the lives of young people.



▼ When people are out in public helping others, they feel more connected to their community.

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▲ **People can organize for a cause as a way to make change in their community.**

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Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is the act of connecting with other people in order to solve issues and improve life within a community. Society as a whole benefits when everyone is engaged in civic duties, such as volunteering and participating in events. Volunteering through service-learning is one way for young people to get involved in their community. Research shows that when students participate in service-learning, they feel a stronger sense of civic responsibility.

Examples of Civic Engagement

- voting
- volunteering
- reading and discussing the news
- attending town meetings
- attending or organizing rallies
- writing to government officials
- participating in school and community events

