

## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Act From the Heart



**Objective:**

Students will use evidence to emphasize a point, recognize the relationship between goals, action, and outcomes; and demonstrate understanding of different points of view.

Estimated time: 1 hour

- Have students read the “Act from the Heart” handout describing how the Clearys have worked to increase safety on college campuses.
- Have students complete the worksheet on page 7 in class or as a homework assignment.
- As a class, discuss students’ answers on the worksheet.
- Ask students to think about and discuss the following question. How did voting play an important role in what the Clearys were able to accomplish?



CONCEPT  
ONE:

# MY VOTE GIVES ME POWER

## Act From the Heart

In 1987, the parents of Jeanne Cleary received an out-of-court settlement from Lehigh University over their lawsuit accusing the school of failing to protect their daughter, who as a freshman, was raped and murdered in her dorm room one year earlier. Using this money, the grieving parents organized a nonprofit information service called *Security On Campus*, with the hope of bringing about awareness of campus violence in the U.S. The Clearys' research showed that 57 violent acts are committed every day at America's colleges and universities and that the governing bodies, (sometimes called Boards of Regents), often used their powers to hide incidents of crimes committed by and against students. Statistics that indicated that as many as one out of 10 women become rape victims during their college years, and the fact that 90% of these crimes involve alcohol, made the Clearys determined to do something. They decided to find a legal way to force colleges to disclose crime information in an effort to reduce campus violence.

They began their work at the state level, realizing that passing a federal law would be especially difficult since it is state laws that deal with most crimes. Colleges are typically state or private institutions that are regulated by the states. By 1988, through fact gathering and lobbying they had their first success. The *Pennsylvania College and University Security Information Act* was passed by the legislature in that state. Ten more states soon followed with similar laws requiring colleges to report crime statistics. Those who failed to do so were told that they would lose state funding. As each state wrote its own version of the legislation, some even adding criminal charges for failure to disclose information, it became evident that uniform codes would make it easier for the public to understand the data and to put it to use in deciding which schools were safest to attend.

The Clearys pointed out that a federal law would make it possible to compare crime rates across state lines. Since it is necessary that proponents of federal legislation demonstrate the need for state consistency, this fact became significant to their efforts at the national level. In addition, the Clearys also pointed out that if a state did not pass its own information act it could easily become a haven for violent student offenders.

The Clearys found two U.S. senators willing to introduce into Congress a federal bill called the *Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act*. To emphasize its seriousness the federal law would include a penalty limiting federal school funding if a university or college violated the act. Opponents voiced their fear that the government's intervention into higher education institutions would be too costly, might encourage misunderstanding of statistics and might possibly hurt the reputation of the schools involved. In spite of these objections the bill passed unanimously in both houses of the U.S. Congress.

When the U.S. Department of Education threatened schools with loss of federal funds if they *did* comply with the new law and open their police records, opponents of the legislation claimed that such action publicized confidential education records. They also said that the federal government had no right to intrude into state and local matters. In an ensuing two-year battle Congress eventually negated the lobbying effort of the opponents of the law by amending the original bill to declare campus law enforcement records as unprotected, non-confidential education information.

# CONCEPT ONE: MY VOTE GIVES ME POWER

Through the year 2000, additional amendments have been attached to *The Student Right To Know Bill.*, broadening the reporting of sexual assaults, expanding crime categories, adding hate crimes to the list, and making available information concerning sex offender registration on campus. The Clearys' dream, to ensure that their daughter's life not be in vain, has come true and continues to make college life safer for millions of students across the United States.

Two concerned parents working with friends and allies conducted the research, collected the data, wrote letters to the editor, appeared before the media, contacted legislators first in the state of Pennsylvania, and then in other states and prevailed in getting state laws passed. They learned how the judicial system in the United States works and, citing the need for consistency, convinced members of the Congress of the United States of the validity of their position. They were confronted by powerful interests such as various Boards of Regents, university bureaucracies, and people who dislike federal intervention into state issues. Their diligence and hard work paid off and demonstrates how much power individuals in a democracy have.

For more information concerning Security On Campus go to <http://www.campussafety.org> or read Citizen Democracy, by Stephen E. Frantzich, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.





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## Act from the Heart worksheet

1. Describe four goals that Connie and Howard Cleary had in mind when organizing their information service, *Security On Campus*.
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
  - d)
2. Define the term lobbyist. Next practice being a lobbyist by writing a paragraph that uses at least three facts to defend the need for campus crime disclosure acts.
3. The Clearys' efforts resulted in a very important federal law. What exactly does this law do? Be sure to include in your answer the amendments made to the law since its first passage.
4. Define the term federalism as it describes our nation's organization of government. Then explain the federalism issue that the Clearys had to overcome to get their law passed.
5. What does this story tell you about what people can accomplish in a democracy?

## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**Choosing an Issue****Objective:**

Students research an issue of interest to them and write a report about what they learned.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Ask students to think about and choose a social or political issue that interests them. Possibilities include: crime, drug abuse, teen suicide, teen pregnancy, AIDS, preservation of national wilderness areas, animal rights, etc.
- Have students research the issue in both its local and national contexts through two or more of the following activities:
  - searching the Internet
  - interviewing an expert
  - reading newspaper or magazine articles
  - contacting a community agency or national organization that focuses on the issue
- Have students write a report about what they learned. The report should include information from their research as well as their own opinions and ideas about the issue.

They should include:

  - a) a discussion of the issue and why it is of concern to others
  - b) a list of organizations and/or individuals working on this issue
  - c) current different approaches to addressing the issue, reflecting opposing positions on the issue
  - d) their opinions about the issue including ideas for community service and/or further action
  - e) how voting and government action at the local, state, and/or national levels has impacted this issue historically
  - f) actions they could take to help bring about this further action
- Have students share what they learned with the rest of the class. Ask each student to highlight in their presentation just the 10 most important points in their reports.
- Following the presentations, have the class discuss the connections they see between the different issues they researched. Students should be instructed to listen for and take notes on these connections during the presentations.



## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Community Survey



**Objective:**

Students conduct a survey of adults in the community to find out what they think about an issue and how they have voted on it in the past.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Decide as a class how many issues students will incorporate in their surveys. Options include:
  - teacher choosing an issue that supports the curriculum
  - class voting on one issue for the whole class to use
  - small groups of 2 to 6 students choosing one of the issues they researched
  - each student developing a survey on just the issue the individual researched
- Have students develop a short list of questions to survey adults in the local community. While students could survey parents, neighbors, or other adults they know; encourage them to seek out adults with expertise on the issue. Questions might include the following:
  - What do you think is the cause of the problem?
  - What do you think is the most promising solution for the problem?
  - Have you ever had the opportunity to vote on something related to this issue? If yes, how did you vote?



*This survey activity and others like it in this curriculum are designed for students to collect community opinions about a topic. They do not provide random sample, quantitative data. However, students should be encouraged to consider the numbers and demographics of those surveyed. They should also attempt to develop questions that are neutral and do not bias the responders in one direction or another.*

- Students could also include in their surveys a hypothetical initiative on the issue. Have them ask those they survey how they would vote on this initiative if they were lawmakers.
- Have students conduct the surveys with an agreed upon number of adults as a homework assignment.



*If time is an issue, have all of the students survey adults on one issue. Each student can survey just one or two adults and then the data can be collated.*

- After students bring their survey results back to class, have them create graphs and charts and/or share their data with the class.
- Discuss what students learned about others' views on societal issues and how surveys and voting may impact these issues. How are surveys used to influence public opinion and policy? How does voting impact social and political issues? Do community members actually vote on the issues involved? Should some issues be voted on by referendum? What are the advantages and limitations of public policy being determined through a referendum?

## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE



**Direct,  
Indirect,  
Advocacy**

### Helping an Organization

**Objective:**

Students will identify an organization working on an issue of concern to them and assist the organization with one of their projects.

Estimated class time: 3 hours



*The teacher, the school, or the local community may deem some organizations inappropriate for this assignment. Teachers may want to screen students' selections before students complete the research. Another option would be for teachers to give students a list of organizations to choose from. If possible, encourage students to help in developing the criteria for selecting an organization; let the students know up front the limits to their choices.*

Teachers will also need to decide whether the organizations for this activity will be local (e.g. Senior Center, Animal Shelter, Soup Kitchen), national (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), international (e.g. Red Cross, UNICEF, Amnesty International, Oxfam) or all three. Each provides different types of opportunities in terms of service. If students' participation in direct service is a priority, local organizations will enable students to volunteer their time working with the organization and/or their clients. Students' work for a national or international organization will more likely be indirect service or advocacy. Students could host a public event to educate others, design a pamphlet to distribute, fundraise, or complete an advocacy activity such as writing a letter to a government official or the local newspaper.

- Have students choose an organization working on an issue of concern to them. (This could be the same issue they researched in preparation activity #1 on p. 10.)
- Have students research the organization through at least two of the following resources: Internet, organization's publications, newspaper or magazine articles, interviewing someone who works for or with the organization.
- As part of learning about the organization, ask students to find out what kinds of projects and programs the organization is involved in and how the organization's mission is connected to public policy. Which of these projects presents an opportunity for the student to get involved in helping to make a difference?
- If the organization is local, students should contribute an agreed upon amount of time to volunteering with that organization. If national, the class can brainstorm various strategies for helping the organization to further its work.



- Students can reflect on and share their efforts with others by creating a photo essay, a poem, or a poster about the organization and the assistance they provided. When their work is completed, have students reflect on the advantages and limitations to different types of service (direct, indirect, and advocacy).



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### Advocacy

### Community Heroes and Heroines

#### Objective:

Students will interview someone who has made a difference working on a chosen issue in their community and publish the story of this person's efforts.

Estimated class time: 3 hours



*For an excellent resource to further develop the ideas in this lesson, see the Giraffe Project educational materials at <http://www.giraffe.org>. Also, teachers may want to involve their students in the Profile in Courage essay contest in conjunction with this lesson's activities. See [http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/pica\\_essay\\_2001\\_ideas.html](http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/pica_essay_2001_ideas.html)*

- Have each student identify a local “hero or heroine,” someone who has made a difference in the local community in regard to a social issue the student cares about. Discuss as a class what makes a hero or heroine. Encourage students to think beyond someone who is famous, to someone who has made a positive difference in the world for others in need or for the environment. Make sure each student has a different community member for this activity (or have students work in small groups to learn about a selected community member).
- Students should contact their community members and ask them if they are willing to be included in this class project. If yes, have students interview their community hero or heroine (or have them ask the community member to complete a written questionnaire developed by the class) to obtain information in the following categories:
  - Background information (name, age, prior education and experience relevant to your community efforts)
  - Early Life - What experiences as a child helped you realize the importance of being involved in the community?
  - Getting Started - How did you first develop an interest in or get involved with this issue? What were your first steps in making a difference?
  - Collaborators - Most people do not work in isolation in the community. Who were the people who assisted you in being able to make a difference?
  - Most Meaningful Contribution - From your own point of view, what is the most meaningful contribution you have made in regard to this issue so far?
  - Political Action - Has politics played a role in your efforts? How? What successes and setbacks have you experienced? How did you deal with them?
  - Plans and Dreams - What further efforts do you plan to undertake? What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
  - How Youth Can Get Involved - What ideas do you have for how youth can get involved in making a difference about this issue?



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- Ask students to write up a story about their community hero/heroine and publish it in an appropriate public outlet. Students might write articles for a special section of the school or local newspaper or they could post the stories on a web site. Another option would be to create a display of selected information about each individual along with photos in a public location such as the local library.



- Have students discuss the common characteristics of the heroes and heroines. What personality characteristics or community events led to their making a difference? What can you learn from their experience to assist you in your community efforts?



## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Educational Outreach



**Indirect,  
Advocacy**

**Objective:**

Students plan a public event to teach others about a local organization making a difference in the community.

Estimated class time: 6 hours

- Decide as a class or club which organization to feature in the public event. Students can list and then vote on one organization or choose an organization that is best aligned with the curriculum of the class or the club's mission. It is also possible for more than one organization to be featured in this event.
- Once a decision is reached, contact the director of this organization to make sure that he or she is willing to collaborate with the class on this project.



*Teachers are encouraged to invite community organization staff to the school to brainstorm ideas for the event and to discern their interest in collaborating in the planning and conducting of the event.*

- Decide as a class or club on a suitable date and location for the event. A Saturday morning may be the best time for high school students involved in sports and after school activities. Possible locations would include a mall, a grocery store, the public library, or another spot where there is likely to be many people at the time of the event.
- Have students form committees to plan and oversee this activity (or have existing school groups and clubs each take on one or more of these tasks). Committees might include:
  - Community liaison - This group is in contact with individuals involved from the local organization, keeps them updated on the class' efforts, and makes sure that their ideas and concerns are central in how the event is planned.
  - Publicity - This committee is responsible for getting the word out to the general public about this event. Strategies might include posters, flyers, public service announcements, a newspaper article, word-of-mouth, and so forth.
  - Information - This group either obtains flyers from the organization or creates written information (e.g. brochures, flyers) to be distributed at the event.
  - Action - This group plans some type of activity that the public can participate in if they choose when they come to the event. Writing letters or signing a petition are two possibilities.

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- Support Services - Will the class need to bring card tables and chairs? If the event lasts for more than a couple of hours, students should plan to bring snacks. This committee can also set up a schedule for who will staff the table during various time slots.
- Fundraising - This group could plan to raise money for the organization through collecting donations or selling small items (baked goods, buttons, bumper stickers, pencils, etc.) at the event.



*Some high schools have specific rules about fundraising. Others are concerned about too many fundraisers. Fundraising is an optional part of this event.*



- After the event, have students evaluate how successful it was. What would they do differently if they were to sponsor a similar event again?



## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE



### Advocacy

### Creative Expressions

#### Objective:

Students will create an artistic display or a public performance to educate the school community about different perspectives on a school issue.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- As a class, decide which school issue to focus on for this service-learning activity.
- Have students research the issue using a variety of resources and personal contacts. Make sure that all perspectives on the issue are represented in students' findings. Decide on what the purpose and message of this activity. Do students want to raise awareness, educate others about diverse views on the issues, promote various solutions to a problem?
- Decide as a class whether to create one type of display/performance or to have small groups work on different ways of educating the school community about the issue. If the former, have the students use voting, along with a discussion of the pros and cons of each possible activity, to make their decision.
- Possibilities for artistic displays and performances include the following:
  - visual arts - drawings, paintings, sculpture, collages, quilts, murals etc.
  - music - composing and/or performing songs about the issue
  - theater - street theater, plays, pantomimes, puppet shows, musicals, readers' theater, rap
  - dance - ballet, jazz, modern, tap, with or without narration or music
  - technology - photos, slide show, videos, interactive computer games
- Depending on students' choices, involve the drama and/or art departments in the school.
- As a class, choose a suitable date, time, and location for the event. If students choose only a visual display, seek a location that will feature the display for a week or longer. If appropriate, publicize the event so that parents and community members can attend.

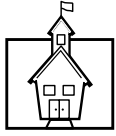


*Many of the committees in the Educational Outreach lesson on p. 15 would be suitable for this service-learning experience as well. In addition, students could form committees to obtain needed props for performances.*

- Have a short survey form for each person who views the event to complete. Include on the form name, age, your thoughts on this issue, and feedback on the event, including if or how the event influenced your thinking about the issue.
- Back in the classroom, have students reflect on the event and read the feedback they received in the survey forms. How did most of the people attending feel about the issue? Did the event have any impact on their thinking?



## CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE



**Direct,  
Indirect,  
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### Issue of the Year

#### Objective:

The student body votes on an issue for the school year and carries out a number of activities to learn about and effect change in regard to this issue.

Estimated class time: year-long activity, time varies depending on choices

- The student council, a service club, or a class coordinates a school-wide vote on which issue the student body should work on during the coming school year. This vote could be coordinated along with the vote for student body president and vice president. Another option would be for students to rank order a list of the top 10 concerns in their homerooms or advisory groups.



*There is no reason why only the top vote getter should be the focus for the school year. Schools could decide they will address the top two or three.*

- Classes, clubs, individuals, and those running for office could campaign for the issue they think is most important for the students to address. Campaign strategies could include: posters, flyers, buttons, bumper stickers, t-shirts, information tables, after school meetings with speakers from the community, and articles in the school newspaper.



*A survey of 1,238 U.S. students in grades 7-12 conducted by Do Something, a nationwide network of young people, found that drunk driving, depression and teen suicide, guns at school, improving schools/education, discrimination, violence in school, drugs, self-esteem, AIDS, and abuse at home are teens' top ten concerns, and two-thirds of teens (67%) plan to get involved during the next year with the issues that are important to them.*

- After one or more issues has been selected; individuals, clubs, and classes can then research the issue further and put out a newsletter of ideas (or a lengthy article in the school newspaper) for student actions. (Many of the individual and group service-learning activities on pp. 12 - 17 would be suitable activities for working on the selected issue(s) throughout the school year.) Also, ask teachers in the school to incorporate some aspect of the issue into their courses sometime during the year. It is also possible to invite parents, public officials, and other community members to participate in the year-long activities.
- One club, class, or teacher should serve as “command central” for these activities, making sure that groups in the school compliment but do not duplicate each others’ efforts. They could also keep track of the activities and their results in the community.
- At the end of the year, the school could have a Celebration Night for students, parents, and community members. The event would highlight information about the issue, actions completed by the students during the school year, and opportunities for others to get involved and make a difference.