

# 11<sup>th</sup> grade: Literacy

**1) Introduction:** Service-learning is an excellent compliment to the English Language Arts curriculum. Much of the standards for ELA focus on students' abilities to communicate ideas through writing, story telling, persuasive essays, and the spoken word. Additionally, the emphasis is on moving students from a technical skills-based understanding of the English language to a thematic socio-historical understanding of world literature. Service-learning provides a context for communication. What do we write about and why? Historically, stories have often been told to highlight societal injustices and/or the remedies to those problems. Service-learning experiences will help students connect the writing of the past to their current realities while at the same time providing a framework for strengthening skills.

## **2) Definition of service-learning:**

Service-learning is a form of teaching and learning that engages students in meaningful service activities in their schools and communities as part of the standard academic curriculum. Integrated into (but not limited to) the school day, service-learning connects young people with structured activities that address human and community issues, and that provide opportunities for increased student academic engagement, civic responsibility, personal and social development and the acquisition of critical thinking skills.

The following concepts are central to good service-learning practice. Evidence of these elements as well as their alignment with Pennsylvania state standards and the School District's promotion/graduation requirements are key to model practices.

- **Student voice in choosing, developing and implementing a project:** Service-learning works best when students are involved in something relevant and meaningful to them. Encourage student participation and sharing of responsibility in all aspects of a project.
- **Identification of genuine need:** The "community" identifying the need can be the class, the school, the neighborhood, a community partner, the city, etc. Goals for addressing problem have the support of designated community and clearly defined goals.
- **Mutual benefit for students and community partner(s):** Students acquire knowledge and skills, and in return contribute a short or long-term solution to the problem. Sensitivity to needs and/or limitations of all parties is important.
- **Sustained student involvement:** Length of project can vary but should span a minimum of 8 weeks. Projects with greater richness and complexity may last a semester or an entire school year.
- **Rigorous, multidisciplinary research:** Projects should meet content standards in at least two academic disciplines and demonstrate writing and research competence. Research can explore root causes/effects, potential solutions or public policy related to the problem.
- **Ongoing reflection:** Reflection activities should occur throughout the project. They reveal cognitive and affective learning and can incorporate speaking, writing and/or multimedia strategies.
- **Assessment of student learning and project impact:** Evaluates academic, personal and social development as well as whether stated community need has been met/addressed. Rubrics and other authentic assessment tools are preferred.
- **Culminating presentation:** Presentations or exhibitions of learning allow students to demonstrate what they have learned for the benefit of others, including community partners.

# 11<sup>th</sup> grade: Literacy

- **Final celebration:** Positive change and collaboration is hard work! Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of all who were involved.

### 3) Sample Project Description

A sample project description is included for your convenience. This particular project is not required, however, it is designed to fit the core curriculum for this subject and it reflects a common issue or problem in many of Philadelphia's communities. Teachers are encouraged to transform this project and take it in new directions.

**Who wears the "A"?:** Despite the gains for the Civil Rights, Women's, Chicano, and Gay and Lesbian Rights Movements in this country, many groups are still marginalized by mainstream culture. In our schools and communities, people are still held back by barriers due to their ethnicity, race, religion, gender, age, immigrant status, educational status, physical ability, and/or sexual behavior. Students will read about one example of this in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1.1.11, 1.3.11 A-C, F). Other works highlighted in this course also explore the theme of institutionalized discrimination – Lorene Carey's *The Price of Child* (racism) and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (gender and sexual behavior as well as its allegorical references to political discrimination.)

For this project, students will read an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* or another local newspaper about discrimination (1.6.11 F). Then, students will research the issue of discrimination and interview experts in the field. Students should be encouraged to think about their own school community, by answering the question, "Who wears the 'A'?" i.e. who among us are the ostracized and marginalized? And more importantly, what can we do about it? Students will choose a particular form of institutionalized discrimination and work to address it through various means (changing personal behavior, changing school policy, and/or changing overall public perception).

At many points in the project, students will return to Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* as a frame of reference. They may use reactions of various characters in the novel as points of comparison for their own reflections on the real-life cases of discrimination they learn about in their project. They may also analyze the author's motivations for writing such a novel in his particular place and time in history. Creative assignments could include writing an "I am" piece situating themselves in the shoes of a member of a marginalized group or writing poetry to express the feelings that arise when one realizes one is a member of an oppressed group – or when one realizes one is a member of an oppressor group. Additionally, students may be asked to keep a journal as both a log of activities (1.4.11 D) as well as repository for reflections during the project.

### 4) Suggested Lessons/Activities

#### **Situating students in the problem**

-Begin with a recent newspaper article of local relevance to initiate discussion of institutionalized discrimination in the school and/or immediate community (1.6.11 F).

#### **Research / Learning**

-Give students an opportunity to analyze how discrimination affects their lives on a personal and community level. Study statistics of suicide rates in their neighborhood and discuss the impact this has on the social, economic, and spiritual health of the community in the short and long term.

# 11<sup>th</sup> grade: Literacy

-Do a community survey among both adults and youth to determine attitudes toward a particular marginalized group (1.6.11 A).

-Invite local diversity counselors, multidisciplinary educators, law enforcement officials, attorneys, and other relevant speakers to the classroom for workshops, testimonials, or interviews

-Research paper topics (1.4.11 B-C, 1.5.11, 1.8.11): What groups have been historically overlooked/ostracized/marginalized in American society? What groups are experiencing this marginalization now? What laws exist that reinforce discrimination against particular groups such as gays and lesbians, the disabled, immigrants, youth, etc.? Just as Hester Prynne decides to keep the A after she is told she no longer needs to wear it, how have marginalized groups reclaimed language and symbols that were once marks of their oppression (i.e. blacks with the use of the word “nigger”, gays with the word “queer.”) (1.7.11 B)?

## Creating a Solution / Serving

- This depends heavily on the specific group and form of discrimination your students try to address. They should be encouraged to consider their own possible oppression as youth and/or racial and ethnic minorities. A logical project outcome may be to exert control over their own representation in the media by creating their own journal, magazine, TV show, etc (1.2.11 B, 1.6.11 F). If this is the case, lessons related to media control and the enforcement of institutionalized discrimination become exceedingly appropriate (1.6.11 F). Or, if they choose to focus on a group different from themselves, they may choose to establish a relationship with that group based on mutual understanding and respect. An example of this could be an oral history project with elderly residents of nursing home (1.6.11 A).

## 5) Sample Rubric

Rubrics can be used at all steps of the service-learning process. Each activity can have its own rubric, and you can use a cumulative rubric to assess student work at the end of the project. Here is a sample rubric that covers student presentations at the actual Health Fair. This rubric was created on Rubistar, a free web-based program which can be found at <http://rubistar.4teachers.org>.

See attached

## 6) Multidisciplinary Connections (Content standards could be added here.)

Social Studies—study of political and economic causes and effects of institutionalized discrimination; historical basis of current laws which protect certain groups (but not others); history of the social context in which *The Scarlet Letter* was written

Technology—use of desktop publishing, word processing, Power Point, iMovie and other software to create new media representations by youth, for youth.

## 7) Where to get more info?

Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.teachingtolerance.org>

American Civic Liberties Union: <http://www.aclu.org>

Disability Rights Commission: <http://www.drc-gb.org/>

## 8) Local Partners

National Coalition Building Institute: <http://www.ncbi.org>

Media Tank: <http://www.mediatank.org/>

Anti-Defamation League: <http://www.adl.org/philadelphia/default.asp>

# 11<sup>th</sup> grade: Literacy

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This curriculum insert was created by Hillary Kane, Director of the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND), as part of a collaborative effort between the School District of Philadelphia and several local community-based organizations, designed to integrate service-learning with the core curriculum.