

Teacher Activity

Community Responsibility

Learning Objectives

Students will

- define what it means to be a responsible community member
- role-play situations that require empathy and responsible decision-making
- analyze the relationship between empathy and responsibility

Overview

This activity will focus on the concept of community responsibility through the lens of responsible decision-making. Students will begin by brainstorming the many communities they are part of. They will then use these communities as reference points as they consider what it means to be a responsible community member and the role that empathy plays in helping them take on new perspectives and better understand their own decisions. They will use a set of situation cards that prompt them to practice putting themselves in other people's shoes as they decide how to act in various situations. The session will wrap up with a writing session and discussion that challenges students to reflect on how empathy affects their decisions and how they can harness empathy as they navigate the challenges of being a responsible community member.

Grade Range

5–8

Timing

60 minutes

Materials Needed

- Community Brainstorming handout, one half-sheet per student
- Empathy Situation Slips (cut out in advance), enough sets for half the class
- Reflection handout, one per student

Procedure

1. **Warm-Up Activity**
 - On the board, write "Community: A group of people who live, work, or play together."
 - Acknowledge that everyone in the class is part of many communities. Some of the communities that the students belong to are the same, and some are different.

- Circle the word “Community” and its definition. Then ask the class to help you brainstorm: What *communities* are you part of? Encourage students to share communities they have in common as well as communities that may be unique to them.
 - As the students brainstorm, write their ideas on the board.
2. Distribute one Community Brainstorming handout to each student. Encourage students to select one community that they are part of that is important to them (such as their school, their sports team, or their religious community). After they have recorded the name of the community in the blank, tell them to brainstorm “dos and don’ts” for being a responsible member of this community.

If needed, remind students that *responsible* means making good choices, being dependable, and being accountable for their actions.

3. While the students are working, record three discussion questions on the board:
 - How are your lists similar? Why do you think there are similarities?
 - How are your lists different? Why do you think there are differences?
 - Why are there “dos and don’ts” for being a responsible community member?
4. After a few minutes have passed, instruct students to form groups of three or four students. Bring their attention to the questions on the board and encourage them to share their lists with each other and then discuss these questions.
5. Bring the students back together as a class and invite them to elaborate on the third question by asking, “Why can’t responsible community members do anything they want? Why do ‘dos and don’ts’ exist? What might put your community at risk?”
6. Then write “Dos for being a Responsible Community Member” on the board. Invite students to share common “dos” that they believe would work for any kind of community. Keep a list as they share.
7. Once several students have shared their “dos,” add “have empathy” to the list. Ask students to share what they believe empathy to be; be sure they understand that empathy is the ability to care about others and being aware of what others are feeling. One way we can practice empathy is by trying to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes.
8. Ask: How can empathy help us be responsible community members and help our communities thrive or succeed? Encourage students to think about their answers and then share their ideas with a peer next to them.
9. Divide students into groups of two or three. Distribute the empathy situation strips. Explain that each strip contains a scenario that they may come across in their own community. Once they read the scenario, they should put themselves in the other person’s shoes as they consider how to respond responsibly and in a way that would benefit their community. One group member should read each scenario aloud, and then the students in the group should discuss their answers to the questions.
10. When groups have finished discussing their scenarios, or when there are about 20 minutes left in the class session, distribute a Reflection handout to each student. Review the directions provided and encourage students to find a comfortable spot in the classroom to respond independently.*

*If there are students who would benefit from additional instruction, you may also work with a small group of students at this time.

11. **Wrap-Up:** Finish the session by bringing the students back together as a class. Conclude with a final discussion question: As responsible community members, what can we do to help build and promote empathy within our community?

National School Standards

[CASEL SEL Framework](#)

- Responsible decision-making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacity to consider ethical standards and safety concerns and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.
- Social awareness: The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

[National Health Education Standards](#)

- Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology.
- Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

[Common Core ELA Standards](#)

- W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly and persuasively.

Community Brainstorming

Community: _____

How can someone be a responsible member of this community?

Dos	Don'ts

Community Brainstorming

Community: _____

How can someone be a responsible member of this community?

Dos	Don'ts

Situation #1

You and your friend notice that another student keeps getting teased for a new haircut. Many students are seeing this happen, but no one is doing anything.

First: Imagine that you are the student getting teased. How do you think this student feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #2

Your brother seems to be having a bad day. He keeps raising his voice and getting mad at everyone for everything, including you!

First: Imagine that you are your brother today. How do you think he is feeling?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #3

A kid is getting made fun of at the bus stop because he or she didn't want to drink alcohol offered to them at a party last weekend. The kid asks the other kids to stop and change the subject, but they keep calling him or her names.

First: Imagine that you are this student. How do you think he or she feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #4

You're spending time with two of your friends when one of them invites you (but not your other friend) to do something after school.

First: Imagine that you are the friend who is not invited. How do you think your friend feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #5

Your classmate is frustrated in math class and doesn't understand why he or she keeps getting low grades. The classmate knows that you do well in math and has asked to copy your homework.

First: Imagine that you are your classmate. How do you think your classmate feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #6

You're at your best friend's birthday party, and kids keep asking him or her to drink alcohol. Your best friend told you he or she doesn't want to drink anything with alcohol but seems uncomfortable saying no.

First: Imagine that you are your best friend. How do you think he or she feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #7

You're at the library and are supposed to be studying for your Spanish test but you can't stop talking to your friend. You keep cracking jokes and are having a great time, but you seem to be getting angry looks from those around you.

First: Imagine that you are one of the people sitting near you. How do you think that person feels?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?

Situation #8

There is a new kid on your baseball team who looks like they are shy. They haven't talked to anyone during the entire practice...and no one has talked to them either!

First: Imagine that you are this student. How do you think they feel?

Then discuss: How could you react responsibly and with empathy in this situation?
