



# CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

## Young Citizens and Media Access

### LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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Funding for lesson plans was provided to the Citizen Advocacy Center by the McCormick Foundation.

## Young Citizens and Media Access

### Lesson Plan and Activities

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**Grade Level:** 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

**Subject(s):**

- Social Studies: U.S., State and Local Government; and
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing.

**Duration:** 1-2 class sessions

**Description:** This lesson invites students to consider the various types of news media and their availability to the public as a means to express views on important issues.

**Goals:**

Illinois Learning Standards

**A. Social Science:** 14A, 14B, 14C, 14D; 16A, 16B; and

**B. English/Language Arts:** 1A, 1B; 3A, 3B, 3C; 4A, 4B.

**Objectives:**

1. Understand the importance of media in our society;
2. List the types of media available to the public;
3. Understand the different roles for different types of media; and
4. Understand how different types of media influence different people.

**Materials:**

A variety of recent newspapers.

**Instruction and Activity**

**Day 1:**

Media are essential for many purposes in our society. Why do you think the media is important? What does the media do?

Possible responses:

- Education of the public on important issues
- Entertainment
- Organizing tool
- Other

Brainstorm different types of media that the public can use to voice their opinions on issues they find important at either the local, state, or national level.

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1. Written Media - newspapers, magazines, newsletters
  - a. Letters to the editor - school paper, community weekly, local paper;
  - b. Op-ed pieces (opinion-editorial);
  - c. Guest columns in weekly or local shopper papers;
  - d. Bringing an issue to the attention of an appropriate reporter; and
  - e. Press releases.
2. Radio
  - a. Call-in programs;
  - b. Public radio; and
  - c. Broadcast editorials.
3. Television
  - a. Bring a story to the attention of a local news station;
  - b. Local cable access shows; and
  - c. Public service announcements (must be non-partisan).
4. Internet
  - a. Discussion forums/groups;
  - b. Personal websites; and
  - c. Live chat.

Brainstorm some issues that students think are important on a school, local, state, or national level. Pick two or three items from that list for further discussion. Ask students the following questions regarding each issue:

- Who are the decision makers for the issue?
- Who influences the decision makers for the issue?
- What types of media can individuals and groups use most effectively in order to get the attention of the decision makers and of people who influence the decision makers?
- Are the same types of media equally effective for all issues?

Example: If the issue is bad cafeteria food at the school, the decision maker is the school board; those who influence the school board might include school principals, parents, parent-teacher organizations, booster clubs, community taxpayers and voters. Effective media types include student to student e-mail to discuss the situation and the organizing effort to seek change, articles and letters to the editor in the school newspaper or in local community newspapers, an e-mail campaign to the school board, public comment at school board meetings and alerting local reporters to the issue. Effective media uses may well vary depending on the issue; for example, senior citizen issues might not be as well handled using electronic communications and the internet as issues affecting young people.

### **Activity 1:**

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Ask students to survey at least three adults, asking the following questions:

- What media do they use?
- What media do they prefer?
- Do the media they use change depending on the purpose?
- Are there restrictions on the types of media used, based on, e.g., time or money?

## **Day 2:**

### **Activity 2:**

Pass out various newspapers to the students. Inform students that the editorial section contains some of the most popularly read pages of any newspaper. Moreover, politicians and their staff read letters to the editor. Have students locate the editorial page. Have them label which pieces are letters to the editor and which are op-ed pieces or other editorial forms.

What are the similarities and differences between the various forms of writing on the editorial page? Who is writing each piece? - officials? - everyday people? What kinds of issues are people writing about? What might prompt someone to write to the newspaper?

### **Activity 3:**

Brainstorm with students about issues important to them that they would be interested in addressing in a letter to the editor in the local newspaper. Ideally, the issue should be one currently going on in the school or in the community.

Review the sample format for a letter to the editor below. Have students compose their own letters to the editor to submit to the school paper or local paper. Topic suggestions:

- School rules (dress code, class requirements, hall passes, eating or chewing gum in class, cell phone use on campus, punishments for rules violations)
- School funding
- School building conditions
- Commending a teacher/principal
- Standardized tests
- School elections
- Year-round school vs. long summer break
- School prayer
- Pledge of allegiance
- Recycling

Tips for writing a letter to the editor:

- Keep it short (400 or fewer words) and on topic to avoid having it edited or eliminated for consideration.
- Get directly to the point, avoiding a long wind-up, such as “I’m sure everyone would agree that...”
- Mention a recent editorial or story in the news which prompted your letter; letters that can be tied to a current event or a published article have a greater chance of being chosen for publication
- Write neatly or type.

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#### Activity 4:

As an assignment, have students watch or listen to a program that allows members of the community to voice their views (public radio, cable access, or even national Sunday shows like ‘Meet the Press’) and then answer in writing the following questions about the program:

- Give the type of media, name of the program and time of airing
- Who was voicing their opinion? Was there a moderator? Was the moderator impartial?
- What issues were discussed? What did you learn about the issues?
- Did you feel that one side was more persuasive than the other (or that the particular individual speaking was persuasive)? Why was that person effective or not effective in getting across their point of view?
- Why were these issues important to the people voicing their views?
- Did you feel that the show was fairly run in allowing the people to explain their positions? Would you have made any changes?

Sample format for a LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Date

Dear Editor:

[A short introduction to your letter. Most effective letters pick one topic, i.e. a particular piece of legislation, an upcoming or recent event, or one aspect of a problem.]

I am disheartened by the current state of public health in Illinois.

[One or two reasons why you think the above is important. Write and rewrite your sentences and pick words with the most meaning.]

[Call to action. For example, ask readers to call their legislators to vote for or against legislation or tell elected officials to change their behavior.]

I hope that Representative \_\_\_\_\_ will support meaningful public health legislation in the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Your name

Title/Affiliation (optional)

Address

Phone number