

Tennessee Secretary of State

Blue Book Lesson Plans

Project: Tackling Issues in Your Community

Author: Addison Pate, Ravenwood High School

Grade Level: High School, U.S. Government and Civics

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For additional lesson plans, click [here](#).



There are a limited number of hard copies of Blue Books available. To see about ordering a set for your classroom, please contact the Secretary of State's office at (615) 741-2819 or one of your local legislators. The online version of the Blue Book is also available [here](#).

Introduction:

A critical lesson for students learning about government and civics is recognizing their role in the community. The abstract concepts of democracy and social contract theory have little meaning without a student's personal connection to their purpose as a citizen. In this activity, as part of the study of Tennessee government, students will research an important issue that is currently impacting their local community. Once they have collected enough information, they will formulate a strategy on how best to solve the issue within their power as a citizen utilizing their local, state, and/or federal government.

Guiding Questions:

- What is a major issue that is currently impacting my community?
- How can I learn more about this issue, including ways to resolve the issue?
- How can I explain to my fellow citizens why this is important and why they, too, should get involved in helping develop a solution?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will...

- Identify and research an important public policy issue directly connected to their local community.
- Describe and execute steps taken to gather information on the issue, decide the point-of-view from which they will take action, and implement change.
- Articulate and present, in their own words, how the issue should be resolved.

Curriculum Standards:

GC.38 - Connect insights gained from appropriate informational text to describe the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and serving in the military or alternative service. (P)

GC.64 - Working with other students, identify a significant public policy issue in your community, gather information about that issue, fairly evaluate the various points of view of competing interests, examine ways of participating in the decision making process about the issue, and write a position paper or make a presentation on how the issue should be resolved. (C, P, TN)

Materials Needed:

- 1) Student internet access
- 2) "Actions Taken" handout (attached)
- 3) Optional: Presentation Rubric for PBL (attached)
- 4) Possible resources:
 - *Tennessee Blue Book* – [online version](#)
 - [Federal Government – Agencies and Elected Officials](#)
 - [County Technical Assistance Service \(CTAS\)](#)
 - [Municipal Technical Advisory Service \(MTAS\)](#)

Background:

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the local, state, and federal representatives from your community. If you're not sure, feel free to view the *Tennessee Blue Book*, in print or [online](#), for help with state representatives and agencies. [USA.gov](#) also has resources for assistance with federal representatives and agencies. CTAS and MTAS have resources for local governments.

Lesson Activities:

The project should be divided into three areas: research, implementation, and presentation.

- **Research:** Students should utilize every possible research option available to them both inside and outside the classroom. This can include, but is not limited to, online search engines, academic articles, newspaper stories, research publications, direct interviews, etc. Bibliographic requirements and minimum number of sources are left to teacher's discretion.
- **Implementation:** Research is the start of the process, but the most important part of the entire project is the work the students do to achieve change (or at least bring awareness of the issue). It is recommended that students be required to turn in an "Actions Taken" checklist, including dates of completed actions and a description of the results, with their final presentation assignment. (A blank "Actions Taken" checklist is attached to this lesson plan.) Some examples may include, but are not limited to:
 - Calling/Visiting local legislator's offices
 - Calling/Visiting local community leaders, churches, or other non-profit or volunteer organizations
 - Calling/Visiting local neighbors
 - Conducting an informal poll on the issue (minimum 100 people) on the issue
 - Participating in a local meeting on the issue
 - Creating pamphlets or other mail pieces explaining the issue
 - Creating a webpage elaborating on the issue
- **Presentation:** Presentations can be as rigid or flexible as the teacher desires. The presentation is a chance for the students to explore the material with their fellow classmates as well as utilize many important skills (i.e. public speaking, eye contact, volume control, etc.) necessary for 21st century success. (An example rubric for presentations attached to this lesson plan.)



Timeline: This lesson can be divided into a 9-week period over the course of the second quarter of the semester or conducted straight through in about two weeks. Teachers should feel free to modify the times to fit your schedule and adjust assignments as needed.

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- **Week 1, Day 1:** The first day should be about setting up the logistics of the project. Students should be divided into small groups of no more than 4 individuals utilizing best grouping practices. Once groups have been announced, the remainder of class should be for modeling the best practices for this assignment. Best practices can be specific to your individual classes. Examples include, but not limited to:
 - **Research Best Practices:**
 - Utilizing the Internet (i.e. proper websites, keyword searches)
 - Comparing Sources
 - Taking Notes
 - **Implementation Best Practices:**
 - Communicating with Sources (i.e. proper etiquette and protocol for reaching out)
 - Probing and Questioning
 - Keeping Records
 - **Presentation Best Practices:**
 - Media Utilization (i.e. audio, video, PowerPoint/Prezi, etc.)
 - Eye Contact, Volume, Pace
 - Writing/Editing
- **Week 1, Day 2 (Optional):** The second day can be used as a research day for groups to get to know one another, discuss possible local issues to focus on, utilize research tools and materials to narrow down their topics, and ultimately make a final decision on what issue will be the main focus of their presentation.
- **Weeks 1-3:** Will be strictly research and development. Students will use this time to choose an issue to address in their project, research that issue to find as much information about the topic as possible, develop a strategy for tackling the issue as well as plan for how they intend to present their finding to the class at the end of the assignment.
- **Week 4, Day 1:** Students will present a brief synopsis (no more than 1 minute) to the class regarding their issue and why they believe their issue is important to the community.
- **Weeks 4-7:** Will be for implementation and recording of the efforts of the students regarding their issue. This can include, but is not limited to:
 - Communicate with or visit government officials to alert them to the issue and ask what steps they will support to resolve the issue. Students can also see what is already being done if the chosen issue is being addressed through other means.

- Communicate with or visit government agencies that are directly connected with the issue and ask what options are available to the agency to address the issue.
- Communicate with or visit non-profits or charity organizations directly impacted by the issue and learn what steps or options are available to resolve the issue.
- Communicate with or visit individual citizens and groups directly impacted by the issue and learn what steps or options are available to resolve the issue.
- Conduct informal polls regarding how their community feels about the topic and what ways the community would like to see the issue resolved.
- **Week 8, Day 1:** In order to help facilitate better presentations, teachers are encouraged to use the first day of Week 8 as classroom time to work on presentations. This gives students time to clarify any confusion or insecurities they may have regarding their work and gives teachers the ability to guide the students toward making better choices.
- **Week 9:** This is the week of presentations for the students. Depending on class size, the presentations can take anywhere from 1-3 days. (Sample rubric is attached).

Option for extension: Invite state legislators or local elected officials to come speak to the classroom about their role in government.

ISSUES PROJECT: ACTIONS TAKEN LIST

ACTION	DATE	DESCRIPTION
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

P R E S E N T A T I O N R U B R I C f o r P B L

	Below Standard (1)	Approaching Standard (2)	At Standard (3)	Above Standard (4)
Explanation of Ideas & Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not present information, arguments, ideas, or findings clearly, concisely, and logically; argument lacks supporting evidence; audience cannot follow the line of reasoning • selects information, develops ideas and uses a style inappropriate to the purpose, task, and audience (may be too much or too little information, or the wrong approach) • does not address alternative or opposing perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents information, findings, arguments and supporting evidence in a way that is not always clear, concise, and logical; line of reasoning is sometimes hard to follow • attempts to select information, develop ideas and use a style appropriate to the purpose, task, and audience but does not fully succeed • attempts to address alternative or opposing perspectives, but not clearly or completely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents information, findings, arguments and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically; audience can easily follow the line of reasoning • selects information, develops ideas and uses a style appropriate to the purpose, task, and audience • clearly and completely addresses alternative or opposing perspectives 	
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not meet requirements for what should be included in the presentation • does not have an introduction and/or conclusion • uses time poorly; the whole presentation, or a part of it, is too short or too long 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets most requirements for what should be included in the presentation • has an introduction and conclusion, but they are not clear or interesting • generally times presentation well, but may spend too much or too little time on a topic, a/v aid, or idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets all requirements for what should be included in the presentation • has a clear and interesting introduction and conclusion • organizes time well; no part of the presentation is too short or too long 	
Eyes & Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not look at audience; reads notes or slides • does not use gestures or movements • lacks poise and confidence (fidgets, slouches, appears nervous) • wears clothing inappropriate for the occasion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes infrequent eye contact; reads notes or slides most of the time • uses a few gestures or movements but they do not look natural • shows some poise and confidence, (only a little fidgeting or nervous movement) • makes some attempt to wear clothing appropriate for the occasion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeps eye contact with audience most of the time; only glances at notes or slides • uses natural gestures and movements • looks poised and confident • wears clothing appropriate for the occasion 	

	Below Standard (1)	Approaching Standard (2)	At Standard (3)	Above Standard (4)
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mumbles or speaks too quickly or slowly • speaks too softly to be understood • frequently uses “filler” words (“uh, um, so, and, like, etc.”) • does not adapt speech for the context and task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks clearly most of the time • speaks loudly enough for the audience to hear most of the time, but may speak in a monotone • occasionally uses filler words • attempts to adapt speech for the context and task but is unsuccessful or inconsistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaks clearly; not too quickly or slowly • speaks loudly enough for everyone to hear; changes tone and pace to maintain interest • rarely uses filler words • adapts speech for the context and task 	
Presentation Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not use audio/visual aids or media • attempts to use one or a few audio/visual aids or media, but they do not add to or may distract from the presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses audio/visual aids or media, but they may sometimes distract from or not add to the presentation • sometimes has trouble bringing audio/visual aids or media smoothly into the presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses well-produced audio/visual aids or media to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence, and to add interest • smoothly brings audio/visual aids or media into the presentation 	
Response to Audience Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not address audience questions (goes off topic or misunderstands without seeking clarification) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answers audience questions, but not always clearly or completely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answers audience questions clearly and completely • seeks clarification, admits “I don’t know” or explains how the answer might be found when unable to answer a question 	
Participation in Team Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all team members participate; only one or two speak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All team members participate, but not equally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All team members participate for about the same length of time • All team members are able to answer questions about the topic as a whole, not just their part of it 	