



THE EXCHANGE



A MARKETPLACE OF STUDENT IDEAS



 SCHOLASTIC

“Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?”

Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?

“An enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts [Americans] to assist one another and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville (1835)

Citizenship is a team sport, uniting private individuals in the public life of their country. But what does citizenship require of us? What responsibilities do we have to the team? The Founding Fathers created a nation dedicated to the individual's right to pursue happiness. At the same time, they defined the virtuous citizen as someone who is willing to set aside self-interest to pursue the common good.

Throughout our country's history Americans have dedicated themselves to national service. They have defended our nation as citizen soldiers and have served their communities to meet civilian needs. Federal programs like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps currently support, fund, and manage these national



service programs. If we admire such service, should we also require it of all citizens?

The debate over mandatory national service centers on the competing claims of liberty and community and the roles of government and the private sector. Supporters of mandatory national service say that it is integral to citizenship, fosters a sense of mutual responsibility, and creates opportunities

for millions of committed young people to serve their communities. While many agree that national service should be promoted by the government for the common good, others say that requiring it of all Americans would be coercive and undermine the spirit of volunteerism.

Now it's your turn to answer the question:

Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?

YES

- Our nation already requires citizens to do many things that are in the public interest, such as paying taxes, sending children to school, and serving as jurors.
- Because democracy permits diversity and public disagreement, the government needs to foster a sense of common identity and national purpose among citizens.
- National service enables citizens to meet important national needs, such as maintaining parks, assisting in hospitals, and helping out during natural disasters.

NO

- Mandatory national service violates fundamental principles of individual liberty.
- Government can effectively support and promote national service as a voluntary activity, remaining true to the spirit of volunteerism that is a hallmark of American society.
- Mandatory national service will create a large, costly bureaucracy that will do a worse job than the work of private citizens in meeting national needs, and will be less beneficial for participants than if they had volunteered.

INTRODUCTION

Grades:
High School

Classroom Time:
45 minutes

Constitution Connections:
Article I, Section 8, Clause 1
13th Amendment to the
Constitution

Materials:

- Student Handout 1
- Student Handout 2
- Student Handout 3
- Student Worksheet

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About this lesson

This research and deliberation activity encourages students to look at the issue of compulsory national service from different points of view. Then, through deliberation, they will find political measures to address this issue. In any deliberation activity, compromise and listening will play a key role in finding common ground. This lesson is designed to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect for differing points of view on controversial issues.

Objectives

Students will be able to evaluate multiple points of view on the issue of compulsory national service and determine what can be done to find common ground between those who have differing views on national service.

What is deliberation?

The framers of the Constitution envisioned deliberation among a diverse citizenry who disagreed on issues because they felt that through compromise, Americans could find ways to promote the common good.

Deliberation is often confused with debate, but the two are different. Debate creates a dichotomy, while deliberation allows for careful consideration of many points of view, so the best choice can be made. Essentially, debate is competitive, focusing on who is right and who is wrong, while deliberation allows for compromise and consensus.

Deliberation is focused around an issue, generally laws or policy, though it can also include public behavior and cultural practices. The Town Hall Wall deliberation method offers multiple points of view and then encourages a conversation around the pros and cons of each perspective in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Call to Action

Encourage your students to work together to find common ground on the question posed at the start of the lesson by using their shared values as a way to build consensus. Your students should work together to craft a class Common Values Statement and individually to craft a personal Point of View statement, both of which can be sent to their congressperson by visiting our website at www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange and click on the **Call to Action** page.

Resources

Links to the documents used in this lesson and extension readings for this lesson are available at the National Constitution Center's website at: www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange.

OPENING: TOWN HALL WALL

1. Display the **Town Hall Wall** poster so all of your students can see it. Next, have them read the description of the issue and the question. Give each student a sticky note and instruct them to write **Yes** or **No** to answer the question, and place it on the Town Hall Wall poster in the appropriate column.

Q: Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?

Students answer **Yes** or **No**.

VALUES: CONSTITUTION AND QUOTES

2. Pass out **Student Handout 1** and have students read it. As a class, review the guidelines for deliberations and discuss the idea of using values in deliberations.
3. Distribute **Student Handout 2**. Have students read the handout and circle or write in the margins words that reflect the values expressed in **Article I, Section 8, Clause 1** of and the **13th Amendment** to the Constitution and the **Quotes to Consider**.
4. Ask your students to share with the class the values they found that were reflected in **Student Handout 2**. Record their answers for the class to see. If the same values are given more than once, then mark them with a star to determine the values with which the majority of the class agrees. These values will be used in Step 7.

POINTS OF VIEW

5. Pass out **Student Handout 3**. Have students read each of the four **Points of View** and circle which they support (students may choose more than one or write their own Point of View on the issue).
6. Provide each student with the **Student Worksheet** and instruct them to complete it.

DELIBERATION

7. Ask your students the following questions. Record their answers for the class to see.

A. What values are evident in each Point of View?

Have students refer to values that were discussed with **Student Handout 2** and categorize these values under the applicable Point of View. Some values will apply to more than one Point of View. If the same values are given more than once, mark them with a star to determine the values with which the majority of the class agrees.

B. In your opinion, what is the most serious potential consequence of each Point of View?

Students should cite consequences from **Student Handout 3** or share any other potential consequences they have thought of.

C. What values do the Points of View have in common?

Use values that have previously been listed to help students find common ground.

D. What tensions or conflicts exist between the Points of View?

Ask your students to compare the lists of values to identify the tensions and conflicts.

E. What compromises are supporters of each of the Points of View willing to make?

Ask students to use evidence and values that were previously listed to support their answers.

F. Should a year of national service be required for all Americans? Explain your answer.

Students should use evidence and values that were previously listed to support their answers.

DEBRIEFING: COMPROMISE STATEMENT

Work together to craft a class **Common Values Statement**, which is negotiated among supporters of each perspective and is based on values that all of the perspectives have in common. For their **Common Values Statement**, encourage your class to work together to find common ground on the question posed at the start of the lesson: "**Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?**" The statement should include the values all of the perspectives have in common and reasons why these values are important to this issue. The statement should also point out where the class has and has not reached consensus. You can then go to www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange and send the class **Common Values Statement** to your congressperson by going to the **Call to Action** page.

Every student should be encouraged to craft their personal Point of View on the question posed at the start of the lesson: "**Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?**" Students can then go to www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange and send their personal Point of View to their congressperson by going to the **Call to Action** page.

Your class can continue the conversation by taking our interactive **Web Poll** at www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange and see how other students around the country voted on the issues, as part of our ongoing conversation at **The Exchange**.

MODIFICATION

To find primary source research documents about this issue, go to www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange, click on the link for "**Should a year of national service be required for all Americans?**" and download the **Research Documents**.

STUDENT HANDOUT 1

ADVICE TO STUDENTS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL DELIBERATION

The National Constitution Center is located in Philadelphia, just a few hundred yards from Independence Hall where the Constitution of the United States was written and signed during the summer of 1787. The men who came to Philadelphia that summer did so because they knew the direction of the country they loved needed to change. They deliberated for nearly four months and created a document that none thought was perfect. But they put forward a challenge to future generations: keep working towards the creation of a “more perfect Union.” The Center was created to support this challenge and encourages students to walk in the steps of the Founders and deliberate the future of our country.

The guidelines presented below have been created to provide you with advice and ideas on how to both present your arguments and hear those of others. The advice below was inspired by the rules adopted by the Constitutional Convention, as presented by George Wythe of Virginia on May 28, 1787.

- Think through your idea before presenting it to the group; you may wish to make a few notes on paper to ensure your idea is clear.
- Listen carefully to other ideas and consider how to incorporate them into your own.
- When you are not speaking, do not have other side conversations, read a book or document, or distract the speaker in another way.
- When challenging an idea, focus on the idea, not the person you are challenging.
- Use the Constitution as support for your ideas; refer to the text and use it as a tool to support your argument.
- Do not dominate the conversation, and do not speak more than twice before allowing everyone else the opportunity to be heard.
- Present your ideas directly to the facilitator or group leader.
- When developing your argument, consider the position of the other side, and use these ideas to support or build compromise into your position.
- Wait to be acknowledged by the facilitator before speaking.

VALUES

The U.S. Constitution is one of our nation’s founding documents. We look to it to understand the supreme law of the land. But we can also read it to discover the values of our democracy, such as equality, freedom, individual rights, justice, the rule of law, and security.

While constitutional values bind us as Americans, their application to particular issues is frequently subject to sharp debate. Moreover, values are sometimes in competition. Competing values should be considered in your deliberation—even if they create tension.

In a deliberation, it is important to consider the basic values that should be upheld by everyone. By considering a variety of values, we can understand one another better in the search for common ground. As your class discusses the perspectives, you may find yourself agreeing with more than one of them. Feel free to combine perspectives, and to describe new points of view.

STUDENT HANDOUT 2

The Constitution

Article I, Section 8, Clause 1 The Congress shall have Power To Lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States...

13th Amendment Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

To learn more, visit the National Constitution Center's Interactive Constitution at:
<http://constitutioncenter.org/constitution>

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

[Mandatory national service and conscription] rests on the assumption that your kids belong to the state. If we buy that assumption then it is for the state -- not for parents, the community, the religious institutions or teachers -- to decide who shall have what values and who shall do what work, when, where and how in our society.

—Ronald Reagan (1979)

Reagan, R. (1979, April 28). A Coercive National Service. Human Events.

National service is an issue that has been largely identified with the Democratic Party and the left of the political spectrum. That is unfortunate, because duty, honor, and country are values that transcend ideology. National service, both civilian and military, can embody the virtues of patriotism that conservatives cherish.

—Senator John McCain (2001)

McCain, J. (2001, October) Putting the "National" in National Service. Washington Monthly. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0110.mccain.html>

I believe that there is a very strong chance that we will see that young people will be put into mandatory service. And the real concern is that there are provisions for what I would call re-education camps for young people, where young people have to go and get trained in a philosophy that the government puts forward and then they have to go to work in some of these politically correct forums.

—Representative Michele Bachmann (2009)

Steller, C. (2009, April 6). Bachmann Fears 'Politically Correct' Re-education Camps for Young People. The Minnesota Independent. Retrieved from <http://minnesotaindependent.com/31237/bachmann-reeducation-camps>

We need your service, right now, at this moment in history. I'm not going to tell you what your role should be; that's for you to discover. But I'm asking you to stand up and play your part. I'm asking you to help change history's course. Put your shoulder up against the wheel. And if you do, I promise you – your life will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, you may remember it as the moment when your own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century.

—President Barack Obama (2009)

Obama, B. (2009, April 21). Remarks by the President at the Signing of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. [Transcript]. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Signing-of-the-Edward-M-Kennedy-Serve-America-Act/

STUDENT HANDOUT 3

Point of View 1

A government-run and financed mandatory national service program for all Americans should be established, and citizens should be paid for their service. Bringing together people from diverse backgrounds would strengthen the social fabric of the nation and would reinforce two important democratic principles: citizenship is a matter of responsibility, not just choice; and we're all equal as citizens, regardless of wealth and status.

Potential Negative Consequences

Such a program would turn participants into government workers, not volunteers.

The cost of a mandatory government-run and funded national service program will require additional taxes.

Government-run national service will decrease the incentive for people to donate their money to charities and time to community service.

Point of View 2

The government should require that every American devote a year of national service to a private non-profit organization. These organizations would draw on the talents and skills of every age group and expand opportunities for people to improve their communities and tackle national challenges. A true system of national service is more than an opportunity; it is an obligation.

Potential Negative Consequences

Even if participants are not working for the government, mandatory participation undermines the spirit of volunteerism and goes against the American grain.

Decisions on which non-profit organizations qualify for the service program could become immersed in politics.

Point of View 3

Participation in national service should be encouraged by the government and facilitated through public-private partnerships like AmeriCorps, VISTA and the MLK Day of Service. By creating incentives, like tuition reimbursement and time-off from jobs, the government makes it easier for people to participate and promotes active citizenship.

Potential Negative Consequences

Unless the program is mandatory, too few people will participate and it won't become a significant part of the US Citizen experience.

Tax dollars are better spent on providing direct services than on recruiting, training, and managing volunteers and hoping for a quality outcome.

Point of View 4

The government should have no involvement in national service. Examples of service to community are everywhere: volunteers giving blood, serving at soup kitchens, building homes for the homeless. This sort of pure volunteerism best reflects the American spirit and adequately serves both community and nation.

Potential Negative Consequences

The percentage of Americans who volunteer may fall from its current level of 26%, and thus certain community and national needs may remain unmet.

Without compensation, significant volunteering becomes something that only wealthy people can afford to do.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

Name:

Date:

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Has the issue of service to your community affected you or someone you know? If so, explain how. Think about how your experience has affected your values regarding national service.

2. List at least one value that is evident in each of the four Points of View.

Point of View 1

Point of View 2

Point of View 3

Point of View 4

3. In your opinion, what is the most serious potential consequence of each Point of View?

Point of View 1

Point of View 2

Point of View 3

Point of View 4

4. What values do the Points of View have in common?

WE THE PEOPLE

Our country faces enormous challenges both foreign and domestic. We need citizens who believe that democracy demands more than voting in November. A sustainable democracy needs citizens who believe in taking part in our nation's political, social and economic discourse. The responsibility for maintaining a democracy that protects the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution is in the hands of the people.

This is why Benjamin Franklin's words at the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 still ring true today:

“A Republic, if you can keep it.”

BE HEARD

Now your students can experience an innovative way to deliberate current constitutional issues with other high school students across the nation that is free of charge.

The Exchange is a dynamic way for high school students to discover how their peers in their classroom and other parts of the country view important issues facing the nation. Past topics include *Is the Constitution Color-Blind?*, *Should a clean and healthy environment be a constitutional right?*, *Should the U.S. reduce immigration?*, *Should the government make sure that every American has affordable health insurance?*, *Should same-sex couples have the right to marry?*

All you need to get involved is...

- Interest in deliberating current events in your classroom
- Interest in constitutional issues
- Internet connectivity

Join the nationwide conversation by...

- Downloading the free lesson plan and educational resources
- Viewing or participating in the live Internet Webcast
- Taking our new online nationwide poll

Join the conversation online at:

www.constitutioncenter.org/exchange



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