



## **SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen: A Series of Examples...**

### **How Can SEL Be Embedded into Social Studies?**

Embedding SEL skills and positive character traits in the subject areas is a wonderful way to help students not only understand these skills and traits but also practice them in an authentic way. There are also other side benefits to these practices which include encouraging and honoring student voice and building student engagement in their learning. Here, we look at two strategies that can be integrated into Social Studies instruction that emphasize problem solving, empathy, perspective taking, and positive character.

#### **Problem Solving and Perspective Taking**

Letters to the editor and editorials often reflect attempts by citizens to generate solutions to problems. Ask students to read an editorial or a letter to the editor on a current topic – including how matters relating to COVID-19 and returning to school are being handled. Have them critique it by applying the decision-making framework below to examine how systematically the writer thought through his or her presentation of and/or response to a problem. Comparing letters and editorials from different sources also can be instructive for students. Another use of the same framework, which can be simplified for use starting in Grade 4, is to analyze areas in the history curriculum. The voyages of great explorers, establishing colonies in America, the Civil War and other conflicts, the writing of the Constitution, the various amendments, the fall of the Soviet Union... these and all other historic events, like current events, can be explored as people's attempts to solve problems and make decisions from their particular perspective. Students can use the framework below to understand how those decisions were made in their context and build their own skills in addressing current issues in their school, community, and the world.

#### **Problem Solving Framework for Social Studies**

1. What is the problem you are thinking about?
2. What people or groups of people are involved? What do you know about the character/laws of life of key individuals involved?
3. What feelings and goals does each person or group have?
4. What are some possible solutions to achieve each goal?
5. What are some of the consequences? (Consider both long- and short-term, for each possible solution)
6. What solution was chosen? Do you think a different choice should have been made? If so, why?
7. What could have been done to improve the chosen plan?
8. Summarize the information in the article and draw some conclusions.

## **Tips for Instruction**

Consider first introducing the approach by bringing in an op-ed article, letter to the editor, or brief article about a historic event and analyzing it with the whole class, using the eight questions above as a framework. As students become comfortable with the framework, you can have them work in groups of 4-5, which will increase each student's participation and help them hear more diverse points of view and suggestions from their classmates. (More guidance for this is available from materials about PLAN problem solving, at [www.secdlab.org/STAT](http://www.secdlab.org/STAT)).

## **Service Learning**

Another strategy that has been proven to be effective is Service Learning. Many schools promote community service as a way for students to be altruistic and contribute to school and community. This is certainly a positive practice for students and teachers, but there can be much more to this when community service is upgraded to service learning. The difference between these two concepts is that in service learning, the service aspect is directly connected to the curriculum and is focused on using what students are learning in class in a tangible and relevant way. Service Learning projects can be developed in almost every subject area, but social studies seems to be particularly appropriate for these projects. Linking service learning to community service is one way to build civic character. Students can learn that they can make a difference in the world around them through these projects.

Service learning can build student engagement by giving students a voice in their own learning. This happens when you give students an opportunity to decide on a project that is personally relevant to them and has the potential to make a difference in a societal problem. Students then design a project which they would like to implement under the guidance of a teacher mentor. Once they have implemented the project, it is important to have them reflect on what they have accomplished to solidify that learning. Of course, service in the context of COVID-19 must be modified, but the challenge of “doing good” under constraint is important for building students' creative problem solving and resilience. Service learning is a great way to engage secondary level students in SEL and character education. For a great example of how a regional high school district has implemented service-learning projects in a variety of subject areas, look at the website (<https://www.hpreg.org/>) for the Hanover Park Regional High School District (a National District of Character) to see specific examples of how this can be done.

These are just two examples that can be effective in infusing SEL and Character Education in Social Studies and related subject areas. Give them a try and see how engaged students can become when given voice and choice!

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*This information sheet was provided by SEL4NJ, the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance of NJ, a voluntary, grass-roots organization working with schools and communities to promote social-emotional and character development and supportive, engaging, inclusive, equitable classroom and school environments for learning. Prepared by Maurice Elias, SEL4NJ Trustee and Director, Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab and William Trusheim, SEL4NJ Trustee and NJASECD President. You can reach us at [info@sel4nj.org](mailto:info@sel4nj.org) and join at [www.SEL4NJ.org](http://www.SEL4NJ.org).*