

EMPOWER STUDENTS TO CREATE CHANGE

LESSON



ESSAY CONTEST



ENGAGED TEENS

**CIVICS AND
ELA LESSON &
ACTIVITIES**
GRADES 7-12

Learn more about the contest
and download materials at
[scholastic.com/createchange](https://www.scholastic.com/createchange)

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO MAKE CHANGE

Inspire your class to take civics into the real world by researching and creating a plan to improve their community through elected office.

OBJECTIVE

Students will research a local civic issue they'd like to change and use evidence to write a persuasive argument about their action plan.

STANDARDS

Common Core ELA

- **CCRA.W.1** Write arguments with evidence.
- **CCRA.W.7** Conduct short research projects.

C3

- **D2.Civ.12.6-8** Assess specific rules and laws (both actual and proposed) as means of addressing public problems.
- **D2.Civ.12.9-12** Analyze how people challenge local and state laws.

TIME

40–60 minutes (plus research and writing time)

MATERIALS

Want to Change the World? classroom poster
Find the Facts! activity sheet
Plan Your Contest Entry sheet
Optional internet access

OPTIONAL PREP

A few weeks in advance, direct students to monitor local news to identify local issues.

1 Begin by having a few volunteers read aloud the stories featured on the classroom poster. Engage the class in a pair/share: *Which stories did you like best? Which one did you relate to most? What surprised or intrigued you?*

2 Segue into a class discussion. Have students identify issues in their own community that they want to change. Collect students' ideas on the board (for older kids, assign this role to a student).

3 Ask: *What is the role of local change? How can local change lead to global change?* Discuss the concept of incremental change and local change as a method of tackling large, complex issues. (Key ideas: Local change can be easier to make, and many local changes will add up to global change. Also, local change can act as proof of concept and help persuade decision makers that a given solution will be effective when scaled up.)

4 Prompt students to brainstorm by writing ways they can start to make local change (for example, writing a letter to a city council member, organizing a boycott, etc.). Have students share their responses with the class.

5 Pose these larger questions: *What's the difference between an influencer of change and someone who makes decisions to enact change through laws, policies, and programs? Why do we need both in our community?*

WHAT WILL YOU ★ RUN FOR? ★ STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST

► **Entry:** A 2- to 3-page persuasive essay outlining a local issue the student would like to change, an office for which they could run to effect change, and their plan for taking action.

► **Entry Details** Each essay will be judged for content, creativity, persuasiveness, and organization. Visit [scholastic.com/createchange](https://www.scholastic.com/createchange) to view the full rubric.

► **Prizing** Three grades 7–8 student winners and three grades 9–12 student winners will receive \$1,000 and a brand-new laptop to help them organize their community around their cause. The teachers of student winners will receive \$500 for their classrooms!

Visit [scholastic.com/createchange](https://www.scholastic.com/createchange) for more information and to enter your students.

ENTRIES
DUE
**MARCH 29,
2020**

6 Introduce the essay contest and hand out the Find the Facts! activity sheet and the Plan Your Contest Entry sheet to aid in writing. As needed, review the distinctions between mayor, city council, and state legislature.

7 Allow students independent time to research and plan their writing. Support them in submitting their essays to the contest.

CHANCE TO WIN FREE BOOKS!

Tell us what you think of these materials! Take our survey at [scholastic.com/createchange/survey](https://www.scholastic.com/createchange/survey).

★ SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS ★

► **To increase the challenge** Direct students to create their own campaign poster that creatively illustrates their issue with a graphic image and tagline that represents them as a candidate.

► **To decrease the challenge** Assign and define the office for which students will run (such as mayor) rather than having them research and choose a role.

Name _____

Find the Facts!

To write a strong persuasive essay, you've got to do your research! Organize the information you need to craft your awesome argument here.

1. BRAINSTORM QUESTIONS

Write everything you want to know about your issue or cause.

2. LIST YOUR SOURCES

Tip: Websites ending in .gov, .edu, and .org are the most reliable.

3. KEEP TRACK OF KEY INFO

Jot down all the important facts that you find. Be sure to note the source for each one.

- ▶ What caused (or causes) the issue?
- ▶ How does the issue impact the community?
- ▶ What solutions have been tried in your community or in other communities? How did it go?
- ▶ Other information

Name _____

Plan Your Contest Entry

You're passionate about a local issue or cause and are inspired to take action! Imagine you're running for mayor, city council, or state legislature so you can effect change. Now, in a 2- to 3-page persuasive essay, tell us about it!

Use the prompts below to plan your essay on this sheet. Refer to the judging criteria.

1. DESCRIBE YOUR CAUSE

What local issue or cause inspired you to take action and run for office?

2. EXPLAIN THE IMPACT

Why is this local issue important to you and your community? Tip: Statistics can strengthen your argument.



3. RUN FOR OFFICE Which local elected office are you running for to help address this issue?

Mayor City Council State Legislature

4. EXPLAIN THE CONNECTION

Why is this office a good choice for your issue?

5. SET A GOAL Once you win, what is a realistic program or policy you want to implement that will help address your issue? ("Realistic" means you may not solve the issue all at once, but you can make progress.)

6. MAKE A PERSUASIVE PLAN Interacting both with other elected officials and the voters you represent, how will you convince people to support your goal?

PS: Don't forget to organize your essay clearly, with an introduction that catches your reader's attention and a conclusion that convinces them your argument is solid!

WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

START WITH YOUR TOWN!

The Safety Advocates

**STUDENTS OF MALDEN HIGH SCHOOL
MALDEN, MA**

With gang membership on the rise in their town, a group of students at Malden High School decided to take action.



In 2012, they lobbied their town for more after-school options for teenagers, to help guard them against joining gangs.

Working with their city council, the group set in motion what would become Malden's Teen Enrichment Center, where kids could go after school to meet, hang out, play sports—and, above all, stay safe.

The Environmental Advocates

**ERICA FERNANDEZ
OXNARD, CA**

As a 12-year-old student, in 2002, Fernandez learned that a natural gas company was planning to build a pipeline through the area where she and her friends lived.

Inspired, she organized protests outside the company's offices, met with community members, and brought other students and citizens together to rally.

The end result: The California State Lands Commission voted unanimously to deny the pipeline project.



The Community Advocates

STUDENTS OF WEBB MIDDLE SCHOOL, AUSTIN, TX



In 2017, a group of students decided to hold the city of Austin accountable on its promise to reinvigorate public spaces. The students advocated for public funding to transform a vacant parking lot into a new city park.

The students met with their principal to launch an awareness campaign—cosponsored by the school—that used petitions, videos, and social media to encourage community support.

The city heard them, launched a Community Envisioning Project for local support, and broke ground on a new city park in fall 2018.

YOUNG ACTIVISTS + PASSION + COMMUNITY = REAL CHANGE