

Core Concept Activities and Exercises

The Core Concepts should be a constant and prevalent feature of team meetings so that students see and learn about the political dimensions of their work. Teachers need to name concepts in the context of activities and lessons so students can begin to integrate these ideas into their everyday lives. Look for teachable moments which challenge team members to use and recall concepts.

One useful way to get students thinking about the core concepts is to list them on the board and discuss students' own definitions before presenting PA's definitions. Have them critique the concepts, identifying and discussing what they would change or add. Defining the concepts for themselves is an important step towards taking ownership of the process. (See [Core Concept Poster Project](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/CoreConceptPosterProject.pdf) www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/CoreConceptPosterProject.pdf). Students should post the core concepts somewhere visible to reinforce them through the year.

Why is it important:

- Public Achievement stresses that participants learn and use a particular set of concepts in order to make sense of their experiences in public and political ways. **Concepts are not just words and their definitions; they are ideas and ways of thinking.** They allow us to engage intellectually the big questions of politics and public life.
- Concepts are a defining feature of Public Achievement; they distinguish PA from community service and many forms of service learning. Public Achievement is unique because it focuses on the public and political dimensions of experiential education. It is just activity, nor just talking, but **it is action that has been discussed in advance, planned, executed, and evaluated in public and political terms.**

How to integrate concepts:

Before you start:

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the core concepts. A major reason as to why coaches and teachers do not use concepts often in their work with teams is that they are not sure of the definitions themselves. It is important to realize that these **concepts are not vocabulary words with correct definitions.** They are contested ideas with multiple definitions to be debated. Another problem with learning concepts is that there are too many to learn at once; start by learning the four which you think are most important for public work, and then learn the rest over time.

In the course of your work:

There are several ways teams use concepts in the course of their work:

1. Concepts can help teams *plan and strategize* actions. Possible questions/tips:
 - How is our project public? Who does it impact? How?
 - What are the politics of our project?

- What is that organization's interest in our project? What power do they have?
 - What power do we have?
 - What might we do to build our power in order to ...?
2. Use concepts to *evaluate* actions; they can help a team think through their action in deeper ways.
 - How did the group do? Were we prepared? In what ways were we accountable?
 - In our negotiations with the administrator, what power did she have? What power did we have? What other sources of power could we tap into to be in a better bargaining position?
 - What is our understanding of the politics of the situation?
 3. Use concepts to *reflect on and learn* from experiences in different ways. Possible questions / tips:
 - What was it like to negotiate with the administrator? How did she treat you? In what ways did you experience her power (over our project, over us)? What was that like?
 - What was it like to make a public presentation in front of hundreds of students? Did you notice yourself acting differently in public? How did the audience respond? How did that make you feel powerful?
 - What was it like to meet homeless people at the shelter? What did we learn about their lives? Do we look at ourselves differently? In what ways was this an encounter with diversity?
 4. Concepts can help you *make sense of group dynamics* / evaluate meetings. Use the concepts to capture what happened in the group. Possible questions / tips:
 - When there is a discussion / dispute where people have different opinions, you can talk about self-interest or diversity.
 - You can talk about inter-personal issues in terms of public/private, power, equality and respect.
 - You can analyze how you made decisions. How did politics play out? What happens when people's self-interests conflict?
 - When the team is having internal problems, analyze it in terms of power. If applicable; name the power struggle.
 - When people are inappropriately talking about their personal lives, name the public / private distinction. Recognize that personal experiences can motivate us to action.

See exercises Ranking Concepts

www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/CoreConceptRanking.pdf

, and Concept Poster Project

www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/CoreConceptPosterProject.pdf, Reading Current Events with Concepts

www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/ReadingCurrentEventsCC.pdf

Additional exercises for working on specific concepts.

Below are a few ideas for further exploration of each concept with links to relative lessons and resources: see www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/CoreConcepts.html for core concept definitions.

- 1.** Public Work
- 2.** Politics
- 3.** Citizenship
- 4.** Democracy
- 5.** Freedom
- 6.** Public
- 7.** Free Spaces
- 8.** Interests
- 9.** Diversity
- 10.** Power
- 11.** Accountability/Responsibility

Public work

Activity Ideas:

Walk-About – Students can explore the campus and nearby neighborhoods identifying community needs.

Utopia – Working individually or in groups, have students design and create a utopia envisioning what their community would be like if they could fix all the problems that they have discovered during the community inventory. They could present their utopia in a variety of ways - in a written format, as a poster, or as a play. This is a good reflection activity. (See Lesson [Our “Puzzling” Community](#)

(www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/OurPuzzlingCommunity.pdf).

Politics

It works well to discuss this concept through literature as well. The following stories provide examples of how citizens work through the power and governance structures to get public decisions made. They illuminate the idea that politics extends beyond the world of the politicians and impacts the everyday processes of bargaining, negotiating, strategizing, etc.

- [The Big Orange Splot](#). Manus Pinkwater (1977)
- [Grandpa’s Corner Store](#) by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (2000)
- [Mrs. Moscovitz’s Last Stand](#) by Arthur A. Levine (1993)

Citizenship

It is useful to introduce this concept through books focused on youth involved in their world such as:

(for more resources see www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/ResourceList.pdf)

- [Free the Children: A Young Man Fights Against Child Labor and Proves that Children Can Change the World](#) by Craig Kielburger, Kevin Major
- [Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship](#) by Marc Kielburger and Craig Kielburger
- [Talking Peace, A Vision for the Next Generation](#) by Jimmy Carter (1995)

Activity Ideas:

Scrabble – Use a home version of Scrabble to have the kids create words associated with citizenship. As they form the words, they have to defend its connection with their issue and work in Public Achievement before gaining points. You could also build a large board for demonstration/group play. Magnetic pieces can be placed on an aluminum board.

Citizenship: Would you Pass? – View and discuss the video a Humboldt High School Public Achievement team created about the test for United States

citizenship. (Video available from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship http://www.publicwork.org/4_0_publ_vid.html#videos)

Democracy

Begin by demonstrating how students can make decisions democratically. See the lessons [How to Make Decisions Democratically!](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/HowToMakeDecisionsDemo.pdf), (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/HowToMakeDecisionsDemo.pdf)

[Know Your Government](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/KnowYourLocalGovernment.pdf), (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/KnowYourLocalGovernment.pdf)

[You and The Government](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/YouAndGovernment.pdf) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/YouAndGovernment.pdf)

Younger students can explore the Kid's Democracy Project at: <http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/mygovt/index.html>. It is a great way to introduce them to the structure of democratic government and the bigger picture of public life.

Freedom

This concept can be connected to the Accountability section. Have students find quotes relating to freedom. They can discuss these in a large group or discuss as a [Socratic Seminar](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/SocraticSeminar.pdf) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/SocraticSeminar.pdf)

Even though [Bill of Rights Day](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Activities/ClassBillOfRights.pdf) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Activities/ClassBillOfRights.pdf) is not until December you could have the students begin thinking of ways to celebrate.

Public

Activity Ideas:

Why Go to School? – This exercise helps students recognize the public and private roles they have, and what behavior is expected in both. Have students list no fewer than ten reasons why they go to school. If they run out of serious reasons, they can feel free to be silly. They should write “public” or “private” behind each reason to show which part of their life that reason fits into. They could also list and describe ten public and ten private places. What makes them public or private?

Free Spaces

You can model this by allowing each PA group to create their own “free space.” (See [*Create a Democratic Space*](#).)

Discuss (even act out) what it is like to be in a space that isn’t free. Imagine life without freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

Interests

Introduce and discuss interests both within the team and in the broader public world. Have students start by completing a [personal inventory](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Activities/PersonalInventory.pdf)—identifying some of their interests. This can be referenced later to generate ideas and identify interests and issues. It is also a useful tool for reflection at the end of the year. Relate the broader conceptual discussion of interests to each individual team member’s self interest in a particular issue and note that people with different interests may want to work on the same issue.

It is also useful to imagine and discuss other people’s interest in an issue. For example:

A mayor, a hotel manager, a high school student, and a homeless person might all want to end homelessness in the city, but they probably have very different interests in the issue.

Diversity

Each individual brings special talents and unique perspectives to public work. Focus on the fact that while each team member is different, what brings them together is a common concern about a public issue. Discuss how each individual’s special talents, background, or perspective can help your team be more successful in their public work. Remind your team of the importance of acknowledging and drawing upon the strength of diversity, within your group and in the public world, while being sensitive to the challenges and problems that it may bring. Students can role play the viewpoint of someone different from them in the lesson [Six Thinking Hats](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/SixThinkingHats.pdf).

Power

Activity Ideas:

[Spheres of Influence](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Activities/SpheresOfInfluence.pdf)

- Students map out people and organizations in relation to their influence on them individually. They start with their own name in the center and continue by writing the names of these influences in the appropriate place on the sphere, depending on the level of influence. At first this exercise assists students in realizing their interconnectedness with their communities, and then it can be used to explore the power structures related to a particular issue.

- [Power Mapping](http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/MindMapping.pdf) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/MindMapping.pdf) Students can begin learning about how to use this tool that is used consistently throughout the PA process.

Related Books:

(see www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/ResourceList.pdf)

- [The Bobbin Girl](#) by Emily Arnold McCully
- [Swimmy](#) by Leo Lionni (1963) A Caldecott Honor Book

Accountability/Responsibility

The responsibility to protect and respect rights as well as shape the public world is both individual and collective. Discussing the *Bill of Rights* and the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹ is a good way to get students talking about rights and responsibilities within public life. The Preamble of the UDHR, for example, puts the responsibility for defending human rights, not only on governments, but also on “every individual and every organ of society.” After they have brainstormed, students should debate and draft a student bill of rights and post on the wall. (See Lesson [That’s My Bill of Rights](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/MyBillOfRights.pdf) and Form [Class Bill of Rights](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Activities/ClassBillOfRights.pdf)).

Students could also draw posters that illustrate responsibilities associated with these rights. In groups, they could create a skit that demonstrates a citizen’s responsibility in a particular situation. (See also Lessons [What Responsibilities Accompany our Rights?](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/RightsResponsibilityCitizen.pdf), [I Have a Right and Responsibility to Vote](#) (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/RightResponsibilityVote.pdf), and [Deciding Among Competing Responsibilities](#). (www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/Lessons/CompetingResponsibilities.pdf))

Another concept...

Community

It is essential that students have a basic understanding of community and how it affects personal identity. Students should understand how the needs of a community can be identified. On the basis of their demonstrated understanding of the needs of the community gained through this process, students will actively participate in service that is thoughtfully organized to address community needs.

Have students identify the various communities they belong to and then list the various

¹ Available at: <http://www.un.org/overview/rights.html> or as a children’s book: [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, An Adaptation for Children](#), by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth (1995) United Nations Publications.

needs within each community. This can be accomplished through small group discussions, reading newspaper and magazine articles, or conducting home, school and/or community surveys. The results can be used to continue discussion regarding community and need. Students should be encouraged to continue to explore news sources and collect articles identifying various community needs that they may not have identified initially.

Activity Ideas:

The “Me” Chart – Have students cut out pictures from magazines that depict the various communities that they are connected to. Place a picture of the student in the middle with lines to the pictures and have descriptions next to the pictures. Students can then post their communities for the rest of the class or school to see.

Your Street – You can get younger students to think about their local community by reading Roni Schotter’s Nothing ever Happens on 90th Street, the story of a girl who explores and writes about her street. Students can then write or sketch what happens on their own street, including personal stories and illustrations describing connections or lack of connections to their immediate neighborhoods.

Community Diagramming – Begin by mapping the diversity and variety of interests within the team, the class and the school.

Community Scavenger Hunt – Explore the community, and write clues about different services or places in the area. Examples: stores, business, parks, recreation centers, creeks, etc. Have the children find the place, go there, and get a business card or introduce themselves and your program. This is a good introduction to the community. At the end reward them for a job well done. Throughout the community scavenger hunt ask who, what, where, when, why, and how?

Synthesizing the Core Concepts

Activity Ideas:

Charades – Form groups of two or three persons. The coach or facilitator writes concepts on large index cards or pieces of paper. The group sits in a circle, and the concepts are laid out so everyone can see what the possibilities are. Then the concepts are turned over, shuffled or handed out in such a way that only the small group knows what their concept is. Then the groups take turns acting out the concept without speaking or writing. (No charades-style sign-spelling) The other participants must guess. After each one is guessed, or after they are all over, the coach can ask some questions about how the concept was presented and what aspect of that idea was emphasized and whether there might be other aspects of the concept that were omitted.

Citizenship Land – Create a board game where the object is to learn from experience and exercise the skills and concepts behind Public Achievement. For example, everyone has a game piece, and they roll the dice to see who goes first. Group members advance in squares according to the numbers on the dice. The

squares may be as follows: you didn't do the work you promised the group-go back four spaces, you rehearsed your interview-go ahead three spaces, go ahead one space if you can give an example of public, etc.

Collages – Split the group up and assign them to different Core Concepts and PA terms. Have them look through a variety of new sources for pictures that represent their respective terms and have them paste their findings on butcher paper or flip chart. Discuss as a group what people learned and how the definitions are defined through their art collage.

Memory – Have the group look through a variety of magazines to find pictures that represent the core concepts they've learned (they can add other PA terms as well like coach, team, community, leadership, private, power-mapping, problem, issue, action, accountability, and evaluation, too). Cut and glue the pictures onto one side of 3x5 note cards while writing the term on an accompanying note card. Discuss and define the terms and how they are represented in the pictures. Shuffle all the note cards turn them face down. Have the kids try to pair up their picture and definition.

Public Achievement Bingo – Design bingo cards with words associated with active citizenship. Choose someone to call off definitions or examples of these words while students silently put markers on their respective cards if they have and know the answer. When one line is completely filled, they yell "BINGO!" and recite their list of terms to ensure they coincide with what was previously defined.

Stay Afloat (Hangman) – Write blanks for the number of letters in a word or phrase having to do with Public Achievement. Give each student a chance to guess a letter until they miss. Take turns suggesting the words and phrases.