

OUR “PUZZLING” COMMUNITY

Grade Level: 2-6

Time: Two 45 minutes sessions

WHAT IS IT?

In this exercise, students contrast an ideal community with an actual community. Working together, they will construct a puzzle representing their ideal community, dependent on each of its pieces.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It is important to analyze not only what your community is like, but how to make it better. This exercise encourages using imagination in public work.

MATERIALS: White posterboard, markers, pencils, tape, scissors

ACTIVITIES/STEPS:

1. Determine what aspects of the community you want groups to focus on (safety, entertainment, education, etc.).
2. Divide students into groups with the same number of students as the number of aspects you've selected in 1) above.
3. In their groups, students will develop criteria of an ideal community—selecting something for each of the aspects you've selected. Encourage them to be creative.
4. Take one posterboard per group and divide it up into puzzle pieces. Cut up the pieces of the puzzle and label the back of each piece with a different aspect of the ideal community from your list.
5. In their small groups, each student should choose a puzzle piece on which they will illustrate what they envision the aspect would look like. Have groups put the puzzle back together, discussing how each part of the community would work together.
6. Ask students to consider their actual communities.
7. Discuss what students observed in each of the aspect areas and ask them to create another list of the “reality” of their actual community.
8. Cut up another puzzle for each group, labeling each piece with an aspect of the actual community. Have the students illustrate what they observed, and put the puzzle back together, discussing how each part of their community works for the whole community. Ask questions such as if all these pieces are important to the way our community works? What pieces are missing? Are there any pieces that you want to get rid of? How is this puzzle different from the other puzzle of the ideal community?

EVALUATION:

- Students write about the positive and negative aspects of their actual community compared to their ideal community. Design a list of reflection questions such as: now that we know what our community has, does it work together? what combinations of puzzle pieces may work better together?
- Students rearrange the pieces of both puzzles, intermixing the ideal and actual communities. This should give them a sense of what they can do to help the community function better.
- Have a community leader/ public figure come in to talk to the students about different developments that are currently taking place in the community that may reflect ideas from both puzzles.

Source: Adapted from Leah Silvers; Earth Force Toolbox, Segment 1