

Resource Guide for “Encountering Democracy”

About. The following guide is designed to accompany a discussion of “Encountering Democracy,” a 3 part documentary on Transitioning Out of Homelessness, Decriminalizing Marijuana, and Youth Police Relations. The documentary emerged from a research project investigating the perspectives of homeless and marginally housed youth in Ottawa on citizenship and democratic practices. Our goal was to develop an advocacy project, in collaboration with the youth, that would address issues of importance to them. Between February and October of 2015, we worked with 50 youth (ages 16-25) at an Ottawa youth drop-in, conducting focus groups, photo projects, walking interviews, and arts and mapping activities. In the end, we settled on creating three short films about the top three issues the youth had identified as most important to them during this period. These are the issues you will see addressed in the films.

We have outlined three different activities that could be done in a classroom setting and provided discussion questions for each activity. These are activities that we did with the youth involved in this project. We have also provided discussion questions to accompany a screening of the film on its own.

This resource guide was compiled by Valerie Stam, Lynette Schick, Rika Moorhouse, and Jacqueline Kennelly as a free resource to be used alongside any or all of the short films collectively entitled Encountering Democracy (Transitioning out of Homelessness, Decriminalizing Marijuana, and Youth-Police Relations). The authors gratefully acknowledge the participation of the youth and youth service providers who made the original research project possible. We are also grateful to the Spencer Foundation’s New Civics Initiative for providing the funding for the project.

For further information about the project, please visit www.jacquelinekennelly.ca and click on ‘Encountering Democracy’.

Activity #1: Thermometer Exercise (active, standing, moving exercise)

Objective: to get a sense of how students see themselves as politically engaged people

Materials: two sheets of paper, with “agree/hot” written on one, and “disagree/cold” written on the other, tape

Time: 20 mins

Instructions:

Place the sheets with agree/hot and disagree/cold on opposite sides of the room.

Have students stand in the middle of the room. Tell them that this thermometer exercise will measure how they feel in relation to the statements you will read out. As you read out statements, students should move along the imaginary thermometer towards the sign that best reflects their opinion or views (agree, disagree, or anywhere in the middle). Let the students know that all statements are opinion statements and there are no right or wrong answers. Once the participants position themselves, follow up with questions to learn more about their thoughts on each statement and why they situated themselves as they did.

They should feel free to move as others talk, if they change their opinion.

Statements (Repeat each statement more than once):

1. I see myself as a political person
2. I contribute to my community
3. Voting is the best way to be politically engaged
4. My issues are represented in political decisions / The things that matter to me are talked about by people in power
5. I feel like this is my city and that I belong in Ottawa
6. My friends and I are treated well when we walk down the street

Discussion questions: (relating to films)

1. How do you think the young people in the film would answer these questions?
2. What does it mean to belong somewhere?
3. How can people make a difference politically?
4. What does political engagement mean to you?

Activity #2: Mapping Exercise

Objective: to understand how students view their city, campus, school, or neighbourhood in terms of safety. Note: this exercise can be scaled up or down geographically depending on your needs, but all groups should draw the same geographic location.

Materials: Flip chart paper, masking tape, and markers

Time: 20 mins

Instructions:

Divide students into groups of 4-5 people. On flipchart paper, have them collectively draw a map of their city (or campus, school, neighbourhood), drawing attention to the areas where they feel safe and unsafe.

Remind them that the drawing does not need to be to scale or a perfect representation of the area. They should focus more on drawing it to describe their experiences and feelings of safety.

Have each group present their drawing to the whole class.

Questions:

1. How does who you are affect your feelings of safety? (Prompt for gender differences, or other differences such as ability or race)
2. How do your feelings of safety impact how you use the space? Do you change your behaviour in order to access certain spaces? (i.e. go with a friend, only go during the day time, etc.)
3. Do you think your presence in a certain area changes how other people perceive it?
4. Are your feelings of safety influenced by past experiences, or perceptions and word of mouth?

Discussion questions (relating to films)

1. What do these films tell you about how these youth experience safety?
2. How are their experiences different from your own, and why?
3. Does their presence in a certain area change how other people perceive it?
4. What makes an area safe or unsafe?

Activity #3: Good Citizen / Bad Citizen Exercise

Objective: to brainstorm ideas on what makes for a good citizen or bad citizen, and how these descriptions develop.

Materials: Flip chart paper, markers, and masking tape

Time: 20 mins

Instructions:

Divide students into groups of 4-6 people. On flip chart paper, have them draw a generic human. Half of the groups will describe what makes a “good citizen” and the other groups will describe what makes a “bad citizen”. They can use drawings or words. When the drawings are completed, have each group present their work back to the class.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a “good citizen”?
2. What does it mean to be a “bad citizen”?
3. Where do these definitions come from?
4. Are there some things on the “bad citizen” description that are not really bad?
5. Are there some things on the “good citizen” description that are not really good?
6. What does it mean to be a politically active citizen?
7. How can people effect positive change?

Discussion questions (related to films):

1. Are the youth in these films seen as “good citizens” or “bad citizens”? Do you agree with these categorizations?
2. How are these youth contributing positively to their community?
3. What are the ways in which their community (or the state) has failed them?

Activity #4: Film Discussion Questions

Transitioning out of Homelessness

<http://bit.ly/1SUGOS1>

1. How did this film make you feel?
2. What were some of the challenges the people in this film faced regarding housing?
3. How important is housing to you? What would it mean for you to have precarious housing, or no housing?
4. What are some policy solutions to the problem of a lack of affordable housing?

Decriminalizing Marijuana

<http://bit.ly/1oNaPq3>

1. Name some of the reasons the people in this film listed for using marijuana.
2. What does it mean for these youth that marijuana use is criminalized? How does that affect their lives? How does it affect your life?
3. What would be the impact of decriminalizing marijuana? What is the difference between decriminalizing and legalizing?

Youth Police Relations

<http://bit.ly/1TsMzMz>

1. What reactions do you have when you see the police? How do they make you feel? Safe, unsafe, etc.
2. How did the stories of the youth in this film make you feel? Could you relate?
3. Why is your relationship with the police different or the same?
4. What is the role of the police in your community? How does this role change or remain the same in different neighbourhoods? Why?

All three films

<http://bit.ly/1KszFFm>

1. What are some ethical issues that came to mind as you watched the films?
2. You will notice that the youths' faces were screened out. How can film as a medium address ethical issues of confidentiality?
3. How well does the medium of film lend itself to participation?

Resources

On Housing:

The Homeless Hub: Finding Solutions to Homelessness

<http://www.homelesshub.ca/>

A Way Home Canada

<http://awayhome.ca/>

(Check out individual city chapters for what is happening near you)

Alliance to End Homelessness Canada

<http://www.caeh.ca/>

(Check out individual city chapters for what is happening near you)

Pivot Legal Society

http://www.pivotlegal.org/homes_for_all

Raising the Roof

<http://www.raisingtheroof.org/>

Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions

<http://www.raisingtheroof.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/road2sols-FINAL.pdf>

The Wellesley Institute

<http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/topics/housing/>

On Legalizing Marijuana:

<http://www.macleans.ca/news/how-to-legalize-marijuana-go-dutch/>

On Policing:

<https://ccla.org/a-recent-history-of-racial-profiling-and-policing/>

<https://ccla.org/issues/policing-and-public-safety/>