



Service Learning LIVE

The FOUR CORNERS EXPERIENCE

*A mind that is stretched by a new idea
can never go back to its original dimensions.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes,
author and U.S. Supreme Court Justice

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by Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A. ©2010

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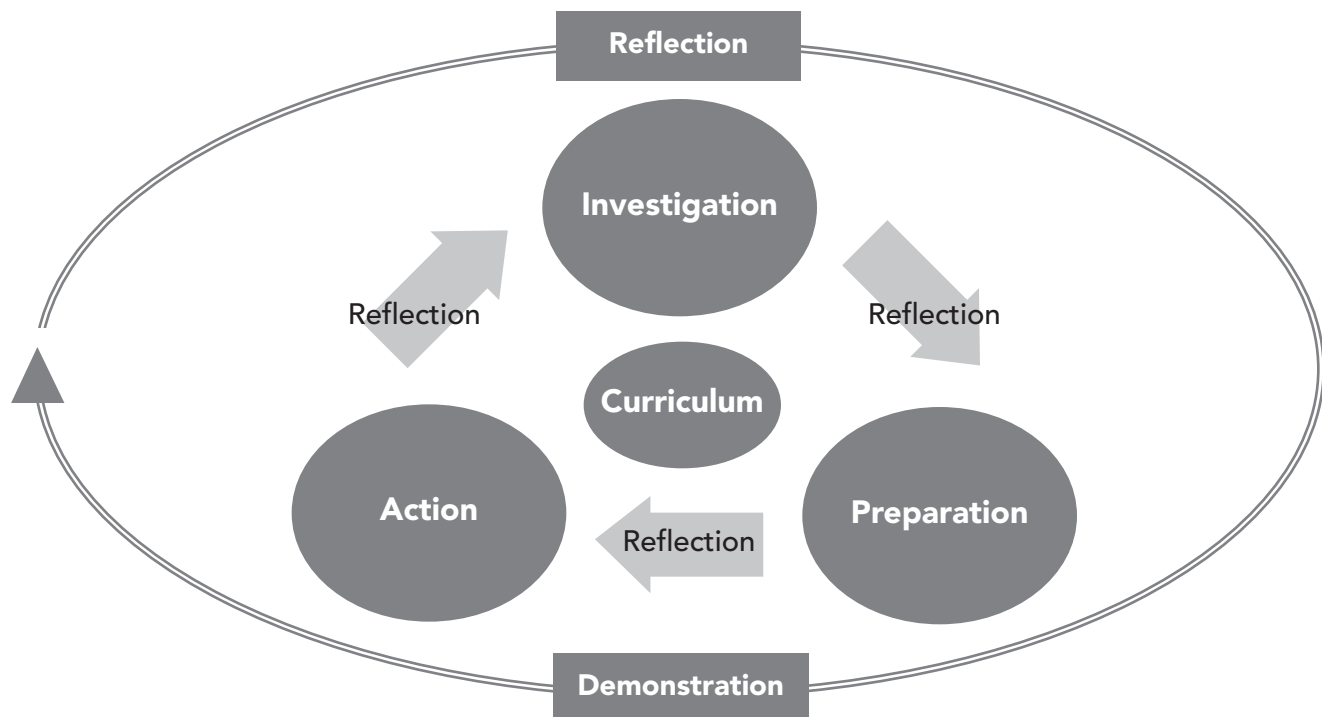
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The Five Stages of Service Learning: A Dynamic Process



In this design, service learning is seen as an engaging dynamic building on the core curriculum.

Investigation: Includes both the *inventory* or *profile* of student interest, skills and talents, and the *social analysis* of the issue being addressed. For this analysis, students gather information about the issue through action research that includes use of varied approaches: media, interviews of experts, surveys of varied populations, and direct observation and personal experiences. The action research typically reveals the authentic need that students will address.

Preparation: The service learning process moves the curriculum forward as students *continue to acquire content knowledge* and raise and resolve questions regarding the authentic need. They identify community partners, *organize a plan* with clarification of roles, responsibilities and time lines, and develop *skills* needed to successfully carry out the plan.

Action: Students implement their plan through *direct service*, *indirect service*, *advocacy*, and/or *research*. Action is planned with partners based on mutual understandings and perspectives, and aims for reciprocal benefits for all involved.

Reflection: Reflection is ongoing and occurs as a considered summation of thoughts and feelings regarding essential questions and varied experiences to inform content knowledge, increase self-awareness, and assist in ongoing planning. When students have varying modalities for reflection, they grow to identify their preferred ways to reflect and value the reflective process. This leads to students becoming reflective by choice.

Demonstration: Student demonstration *captures the entire service learning experience*, beginning with investigation, and includes what has been learned, the process of learning, and the service or contribution accomplished. Sharing this with an audience educates and informs others. Students draw upon their skills and talents in the manner of demonstration, often integrating technology.

FOUR CORNERS EXPERIENCE

Purpose

- To gain understanding of the five stages of service learning
- To collaborate in developing ideas, and analyzing social issues and their underlying causes
- To distinguish between different types of action

Materials

- ✓ Easel paper and markers for each group (one marker per person); sticky notes, about 8 per person
- ✓ Optional student organizers are referenced throughout

Context

During Four Corners, participants experience the five stages of the service learning process: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. Depending on the time allotment, the emphasis is on investigation, leading to generating possible ideas for action. Anytime during this process pause to ask: “What is this process like?” “What have you discovered?” “What skills are you using?” “What have you learned?” This models ongoing reflection and metacognition.

Through guided prompts and a sequence of group interactions, these constructs become avenues for discovery. Paramount is under-directing, i.e., offering minimal precise directions and reliance on teamwork and interactions within and between groups for interpretation, planning and moving forward. Elements of the Four Corners Experience can be customized for a variety of learning opportunities. What results on the students’ paper is a visual mandala of a service learning process and concept that can easily lead to continued preparation, depth of understanding, and purposeful action.

Sample directions and times are provided. This is meant to be a fast pace experience, however adjust the timings for your students. It is always acceptable after the allotted time to say, “Who needs more time?”, take suggestions for how long, and adjust. Again, this gives students a voice and a choice. **Allow also for intermittent whole group sharing of topics, needs, and ideas; this is not always noted.**

Opening

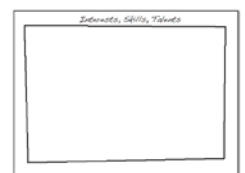
- Participants stand and find partners; as an option partners can be assigned or randomly paired. Two pairs combine to form a group of four (odd numbers may require a group of five). These small groups gather around an easel paper, each person having a marker. This is their Four Corners Experience Group. Relate how in many cultures the number “four” has significance as representing the “whole.” There are expressions like “the four corners of the earth,” and we have four directions—north, south, east, and west. This idea of “four corners” will set a direction for understanding the service learning process.

Process

The Stages of Service Learning: Investigation

Paired Interviews — Interests, Skills, Talents

- Use an easel paper as a model. Draw a frame on the easel paper. In their group of four, direct students to: “Form pairs. Now, interview each other and **represent** within the



frame—leaving the large space in the center blank—your partner’s interests, skills, and talents.” The term “represent” is used intentionally so the choice of using words or images is up to the individual, however do not mention this. If students ask “Should I draw? Should I write?” *repeat original directions word for word*. Allow three to four minutes.

- In complete silence, direct students to, in one minute, learn about the group members. You will note some students will turn the paper, others will walk around the table; variety is what makes this process fascinating to watch as we observe how students interpret. All responses are welcome.
- Reference that now that they know about their group, their task is to continually draw upon the members interests, skills, and talents while moving forward with the Four Corners Experience.

Finding an Issue: Using Newspapers (Optional)

Using newspapers is optional though recommended to introduce topics and for students to read and discuss the news. The “Discussion Circle Roles—The Process” organizer is recommended to use.

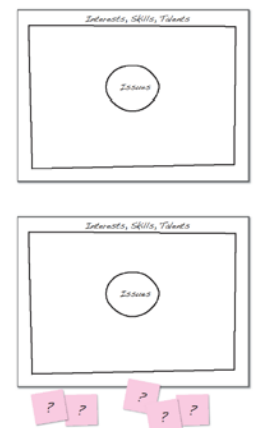
If this experience relates to a specific school subject, academic content, or field experience, narrow the search for articles. This may require the facilitator to provide newspapers with articles on this topic. As another variation, envelopes with articles can be provided for specific reading. **Adjust as needed.** The description here is for a broad topic base.

To prepare, provide varied newspapers if possible, from local to national. Remove sections that are not topic related (sports may or may not have articles on community “issues”). Students can share sections if needed.

- Provide each group with enough newspaper sections for students to look at individually or with a partner. Direct students to search for issues significant and relevant to their communities. Sample topics can be listed using the 13 thematic chapters from *The Complete Guide to Service Learning* or the UN Sustainability Goals. For each article or advertisement related to a topic, they label the newspaper by writing the category, e.g., “Hunger” on the newspaper or labeling with a sticky note.
- Have students read one article for about five minutes and participate in Discussion Circles on this topic using the document “Discussion Circles—The Process” guide; this takes 16 minutes after modeling the process.

Selecting an Issue

- Direct students to: “Place a circle (or other shape) in the middle of the paper, a little larger than a fist. Everyone has a marker in their hands. Inside the circle, collectively list issues (hunger, pollution, cyberbullying) they care about.” Allow one minute.
- Now, give students one minute to agree on one topic to explore for this experience; this requires discussion and agreement. If two or more categories go together they can include both. Ask them to circle the selected topic/combined topics so if anyone walked by, they would know what the group is working on.



Asking Questions

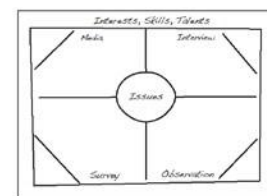
- Using sticky notes, each person writes two to four questions regarding the topic on their table, one question per sticky note. Allow a few minutes. **Option:** Particularly for older students, announce all the different categories chosen by the different groups. As students write questions for their own group, they are encouraged to also write questions for other groups

and deliver these to the tables. This allows students to participate in all the topics by influencing conversations and introducing ideas. Plus, they really like to receive questions! The facilitator also delivers questions, and any adults in the room so the same.

- Direct students as follows: “You have two minutes to get to know your questions.” Often, not always, students sort and categorize the questions; sometimes priorities and categories emerge. Additional questions are sometimes added. **Be certain to under-direct so students have choice on what they do.**

Preparing for Action Research

- Direct students to add eight additional lines to the inside section of the frame: four corners, and two vertical and two horizontal lines from the center circle.
- After developing questions comes research. Let students know there are four ways to conduct Action Research.



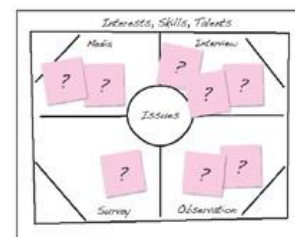
Note: If students are unfamiliar with the MISO Method of Action Research, lead this:

Ask, when told to do research, what is the first method they think of? Typically, students respond Google or other website. Write on the board, Research = Google. Ask if this is true. Let students know that Google and other such sites are *search engines* for looking up *other people's research*. To “research” or “re-search” means to *look again*. There is a quote from the 1930s that states: “Copying from one person is plagiarism; copying from two is research.”

There are four kinds of Action Research:

- **Media** – internet, television, newspapers, films, maps, and more
- **Interview** – asking an expert
- **Survey** – using set questions with people who have knowledge on a topic or for general knowledge or opinions
- **Observation, Experiments, and Experience** – using our surroundings or memories of being somewhere, or creating an experiment or simulation

- The acronym is MISO, like Japanese soup. On the model to demonstrate for the participants, print Media, Interview, Survey, and Observation, one in each **large space**.
- Direct students to place the questions in the action research modality best suited for obtaining answers. Expect lively discussion. Students may ask the facilitator what to do with questions that can go in more than one category. Avoid answering. Let the students come up with their own ideas.



Conducting Action Research

This segment depends on whether Four Corners Experience is part of a workshop or a classroom dynamic. For a class, you can expand time for research as to what is appropriate for depth of learning; for example, it could during in class and out of class time. The explanation here is for a workshop setting. The time again varies. If in a school setting, alert the community that students may be coming to classrooms or offices (let them know the possible timing) for interviews, surveys, and observations and request their flexibility and participation.

- Then allow 15-30 minutes (adjust as needed) for participants to conduct action research, for example, they can use whatever **media** is available—books, newspapers, social media, internet; **interviews** can be conducted by interrupting others (participants and adults—you may ask for others to stop in) to ask questions, or even by making phone calls; create a three-question opinion or fact-finding **survey** and ask class members or others; and do **observation** as they can. Allowing participants to be inventive with fewer directions works well. Participants document findings on their paper (sticky notes, whatever means they can).

Note: Remind students to draw upon the interests, skills, and talents of group members as they plan and conduct action research. It is a **MUST** that they do not all remain at the table.

- Allow time (2-10 minutes) for groups to share findings with each other and then ask the entire group: “What happened? What did we do? What did we learn about the process of action research? How can this inform what we do in service? Were any needs emerging? How can we apply this approach outside the classroom?”
- Usually, a thoughtful investigation reveals a **NEED**. Have students in their groups discuss: What needs are we discovering? This can also lead to discussing **assets** that are also present related to this need. Have students identify a need, and add it to a sticky note in the center of their paper.

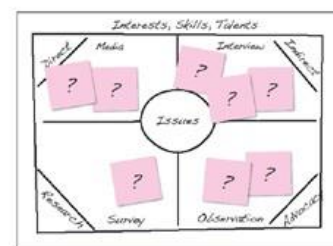
The Stages of Service Learning: Preparation

In a workshop setting, this is referenced more than completed (see below). In a classroom, dedicate appropriate time for curricular processes, both knowledge and skill development, and understanding the historical, cultural, societal, and social and ethical implications of the issue, as is appropriate.

- For five minutes, have participants consider what knowledge and skills will be needed to be better prepared for taking action. This may inform what can occur in or out of a classroom as a follow-up. These can be noted on sticky notes or in any other ingenious way, or . . .
- For a few minutes, generate ideas as an entire group for continued acquisition of knowledge and skills needed. Common skills and knowledge may be needed even if diverse topics are selected.

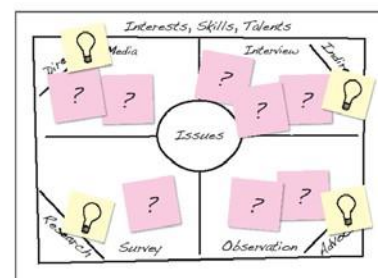
The Stages of Service Learning: Action

- On their paper, in the corners, write Direct, Indirect, Advocacy, and Research. Review what each means in the context of service learning.
- Participants generate ideas of service for each category based on what they have discovered so far. Explain that this requires reasoned judgment since they will need to authenticate the existing assets and confirm any need especially with any potential partners before moving forward with action.



Note: Remind participants to reference and incorporate their interests, skills, and talents as they determine ideas for action.

- Optional: Participants add another consideration to their ideas for action, again using sticky notes. Determine which of these actions can be applied to Self (their own behavior), School (impact in knowledge or behaviors), Community (outside the school setting), and the World (for example through extended partnerships or media).
- Allow four minutes for participants, in their groups, to prepare an elevator pitch that summarizes their identified need and approach to



action. Reference the organizer “What’s Your Elevator Speech?” Deliver the speeches either for the whole group or in paired groups for feedback.

Reflection

Reflection has been ongoing throughout the process; however summative reflection can be led in several ways:

- Use the “Four Square Reflection Tool” for students to write or draw in four boxes: What happened; How I felt; Ideas; and Questions. Students can then stand and find partners and share any one of their responses.
- Each small group creates a headline that summarizes their collective experience – this can be drawn on paper.

Demonstration

- Having students discuss what they learned, and what they hope to accomplish together is a way to lay the foundation of demonstration. The Elevator Speech can also be a form of demonstration.

Additional resources on each of the five service learning stages can be found in *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*.

Closing

- Leading one of the Reflection strategies is a great closing. In addition, you might direct:
 - A museum “walk” to see all the group work.
 - Discussions of putting their ideas into action.
 - Summarizing what needs to be learned and what skills need to be acquired moving forward.
- Reference “The Five Stages of Service Learning: A Dynamic Process” to review what participants experienced. Ask participants for any new insights and understandings about how the service learning process works and can be beneficial to all involved; this is also a reflective process.
- Discuss how this be used in classes, either the entire process or segments.

Personal Inventory

Interests, skills, and talents—we all have them. What are yours?

Interests are what you think about and what you would like to know more about—for example, technology, the arts, social media, or an historical event. Are you interested in animals, movies, mysteries, or travel? Do you collect anything?

Skills and talents have to do with things that you like to do or that you do easily or well. Is there an activity you especially enjoy? Do you have a favorite subject in school? Do you sing, play the saxophone, or study ballet? Do you know more than one language? Can you cook? Do you have any special computer abilities, like to take photographs or play soccer?

Areas for growth refer to abilities or qualities you aim to develop or improve.

Work with a partner and take turns interviewing each other to identify your interests, skills and talents, areas for growth, and to find out how you have helped and been helped by others.

Interests: I like to learn and think about . . . _____

Skills and talents: I can . . . _____

Areas for Growth: What I aim to develop or improve _____

Being helpful: Describe a time when you helped someone. _____

Receiving help: Describe a time when someone helped you. _____

Gathering Information about a Community Need

What does your community need? Use the questions in the following four categories as guides for finding out. As a class, you might agree to explore one topic, for example, how kids get along at school, or hunger and poverty, or an environmental concern. Or you might decide to learn about general needs at school or in the surrounding area.

Form smaller groups, with each group focusing on one category and gathering information in a different way.

Finding out about _____

Media

What media (newspapers—including school newspapers, TV stations, radio) in your community might have helpful information? List ways you can work with different media to learn about issues and needs in your community.

Interviews

Think of a person who is knowledgeable about this topic in your area—perhaps someone at school, in a local organization, or government office. Write four questions you would ask this person in an interview.

An interview with _____ .

Questions:

-
-
-
-

Gathering Information about a Community Need *continued*

Survey

A survey can help you find out what people know or think about a topic and get ideas for helping. Who could you survey—students, family members, neighbors? How many surveys would you want to have completed? Write sample survey questions.

Who to survey:

How many surveys?

Questions for the survey:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Observation and Experience

How can you gather information through your own observation and experience?

Where would you go? What would you do there? How would you keep track of what you find out?

Next Steps

Share your ideas. Make a plan for gathering information using the four categories. If you are working in small groups, each group may want to involve people in other groups. For example, everyone could help conduct the survey and collect the results.

***I never perfected an invention
that I did not think about
in terms of the service it might give others . . .
I find out what the world needs,
then I proceed to invent.***

Thomas A. Edison, inventor

Mapping the Community: Assets and Needs

When learning about a community, find out the specific assets and needs.

Why this matters:

How this can be accomplished:

Assets can be people, structures, the natural environment, an existing program, economic means, history, culture, and more.

Apply the **MISO** method to discover:

ASSETS

NEEDS

MEDIA

All kinds—
newspapers to maps

INTERVIEWS

Capture diverse voices

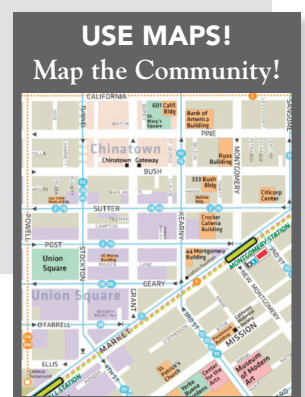
SURVEYS

Collect diverse ideas
and opinions

OBSERVATIONS

Widen your vision

USE ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS to develop questions, set a timeline, identify partners, clarify roles and responsibilities, and determine what you will do with the information you learn.



Proposal for Action

Student names:

Teacher:

School:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Our idea:

Need: Why this plan is needed.

Purpose: How this plan will help.

Participation: Who will be involved and what they will do.

Students:

Teachers:

Other adults:

Organizations or groups:

Outcomes: What we expect to happen as the result of our work.

How we will check progress and outcomes: What evidence we will collect and how we will use it.

Resources : What we need to get the job done, such as supplies.

Signatures:

What's Your Elevator Speech?

Read this first!

Imagine you step into an elevator and the president of your country is there. The President asks, “**What’s on your mind?**” As you ride the elevator you have about 10 seconds and 12-15 words before the elevator stops at the next floor. What message will you say about your Service Learning Plan? That’s your “elevator speech.” Have one ready! Go to the bottom of this page to ride the elevator and prepare your message.

5th Floor

(This is the “ask”: Invite the person to be involved.)

4th Floor

(Tell what you are doing to help, or what **you** hope to accomplish.)

3rd Floor

(More info! Be descriptive. Caring leads to involvement.)

2nd Floor

(Provide important information about your cause, for example, “Did you know...”)

1st Floor

(Introductions, and grab the person’s attention with a compelling statement.)



Progress Monitoring

To monitor our progress we will:

☐ Observe

☐ Ask Questions

☐ Do a Survey

☐ Take Photos

☐ Draw Pictures

☐ _____

Date _____

Step One: What is the need?

Date _____

Step Two: What has changed?

Date _____

Step Three: What else has changed?

Date _____

Step Four: What are the results?

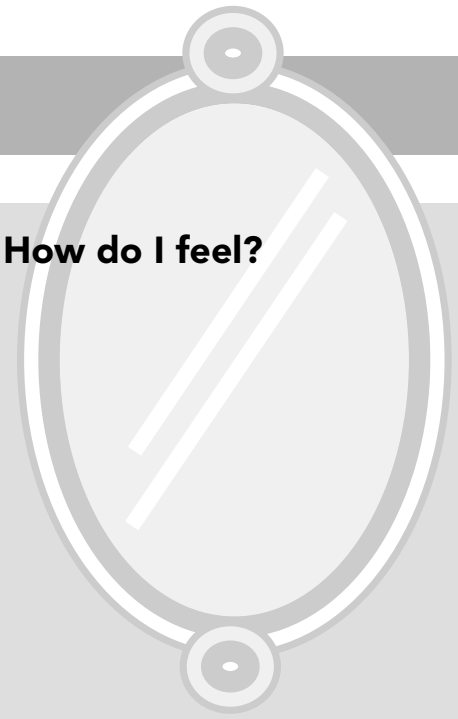
Four Square Reflection Tool

What happened?

How do I feel?

Ideas?

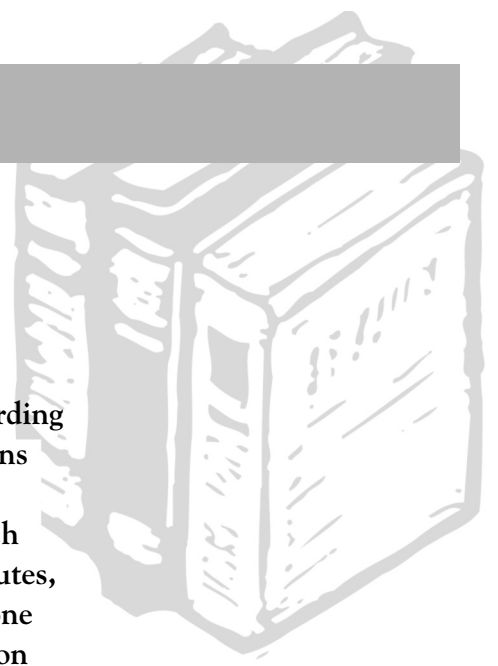
Questions?



Discussion Circle Roles—The Process

Form groups of four for your discussion.

Assign each person in the group one of the four “connector” roles below. Each connector leads a portion of the group discussion regarding the content. During your time as discussion leader, ask the questions below (along with others that come to mind) and encourage group members to respond. Establish the time allotment, for example, each person could lead his or her share of the conversation for four minutes, allowing approximately one minute for each person to answer and one minute for the connector to answer as well. Write notes and ideas on the Discussion Circle page.



Personal Connector

Ask questions that connect the content to group members' experiences, such as:

1. What does this information have to do with you or others you know?
2. Are you reminded of any situations you have been in or know about similar to those described in the article? What happened?
3. How have you or people you know resolved similar situations?

Topic Connector

Ask questions that connect this content to other information you know about this topic, such as:

1. What new ideas did you learn about this topic?
2. What situations described are you familiar with from personal experience?
3. What additional questions do you have about this topic?

Service Connector

Ask questions that connect this content to ideas for service plans, such as:

1. Did any noteworthy, helpful action take place in what you have read?
2. What service ideas did you think of when you read this?
3. What resources did you learn about that could be helpful as you create a plan for action?

Learning Connector

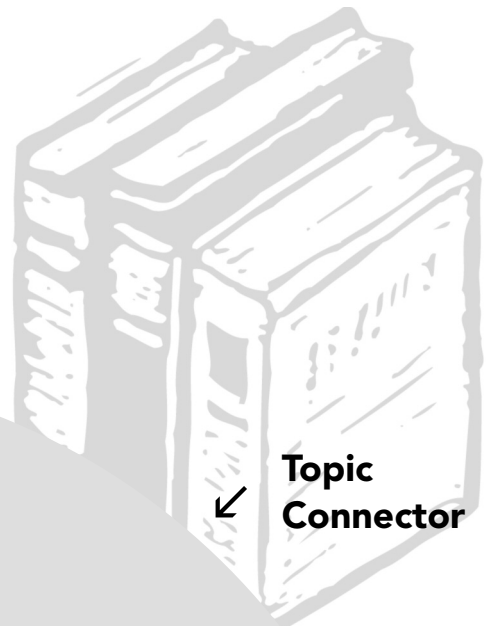
Ask questions that connect this content to learning opportunities, such as:

1. What else would you like to know about this topic or content?
2. What related topics have you learned about or experienced in school?
3. What do you think people your age would learn from reading this?

Discussion Circle

To begin, review these tips for effective group discussions:

- Use active listening skills.
- Ask questions.
- Take turns speaking.
- Welcome all comments.



**Personal
Connector** ↘

↙ **Topic
Connector**

↗ **Service
Connector**

↖ **Learning
Connector**

Process Notes: