Votes Count

Introduction

In this session students discuss the responsibilities of being part of a community and how they can help make decisions that impact their community for the better. They identify some potential problems, brainstorm solutions that could help improve the community, and ultimately exercise their right to vote as a community member.

This session enables students to explore their role as a responsible member of a community. Through analysis and empathy, students apply a problem-solving approach that highlights the importance of looking at a situation from different perspectives, using creativity to identify potential solutions, and ultimately, voting on their chosen solution.

Session at a Glance

Big Ideas

- Responsible community members participate in improving the community.
- Voting is a way to make sure everyone has a say in community decisions.

Learning Organizer

The following activities are included in this session. These facilitation instructions include detailed instructions for facilitating all activities.

Learning Outline

Activity Overview	Objectives	Materials	Time
Welcome			5 minutes
Warm-Up: Community Changes Students are introduced to the concept of being a responsible community member and then identify problems they see in the community park.	• Use reason and logic to assess and analyze problems.	Onscreen Presentation: Votes Count Student Activity: Learning Log – Responsibility Community Map Poster or Interactive Map	10–15 minutes

(continued)

Learning Outline *(continued)*

Activity Overview	Objectives	Materials	Time
Activity: Solving Community Problems Students identify potential problems in the park, gather input from community members, vote on one problem they would like to solve, and brainstorm potential solutions to the problem.	• Use empathy and observation skills to express community wants and needs. • Generate solutions to a problem using brainstorming techniques. • Identify and propose a creative solution to a community problem.	Onscreen Presentation: Votes Count	20–25 minutes
Wrap-Up: How Can You Help? Students draw a picture about an improvement they would like to make in their own community.	• Recognize that community members have a responsibility to get involved to help meet a community's needs.	Onscreen Presentation: Votes Count Student Activity: Learning Log – How Can You Help?	5 minutes
Together at Home Students create a poster to create awareness about a community issue.		Onscreen Presentation: Votes Count Student Activity: Learning Log – Poster for Change	

Preparation and Materials

Before the session, do the following:

☐ Access and review the session materials from JA Connect™ Learning Platform, including the onscreen presentation and student materials.

- Click through the onscreen presentation; practice navigating and using the interactive features; open and preview any videos or Web resources.
- Become familiar with the key terms defined in the session.
- Be prepared to read onscreen information and dialogue to the students or choose strong readers who may want to participate.

☐ Review the timing of each segment in advance so you are conscious of the content to cover in the allotted session time.

☐ Decide how you will deliver the student materials. Digital versions can be downloaded and printed, or viewed digitally. They are not fillable forms.

☐ Prepare a space to record the list of problems that the students identify (whiteboard, easel paper, interactive whiteboard, or a blank online document).

☐ Consider preparing a story to share with students about a time when you helped make a change in your community and what inspired you to get involved.

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Materials Guide for This Session

Materials	In-Class	Digital
Guide for Volunteers and Teachers: Votes Count (This document) Session information, setup, and talking points for volunteers or teachers to implement the session	✓	✓
Student Activity: Learning Log Handout for students to write notes and complete activities	✓	✓
Community Map Large printed or digital interactive community map	✓	✓
Facilitator Onscreen Presentation: Votes Count Instructional content in interactive slides designed for volunteers or teachers to project or share onscreen	✓	✓
JA Name Tags	✓	
Pencils, markers, or crayons (not included)	✓	✓
Whiteboard, easel paper, or sheets of blank paper (not included)	✓	

Facilitation Instructions

Onscreen Presentation Slides

Use the following talking points and instructions to help you implement the session and facilitate student learning.

⏻ Welcome | 5 min.

Presentation Tip
Build rapport and connect with students by calling them by name whenever possible.

1. Welcome students to the session. As needed, introduce yourself and explain what you do.

   📖 **Share a brief story about how you or someone you know brought about a positive change to your community. How did making a change make you feel? What inspired you to get involved?**

2. Engage with students by asking them a little about themselves. Ask a few selected students about a time when they did something that made them feel proud or strong.

   💬 **When you do something good for people, you feel happy that you helped others.**

3. Distribute name tags, if applicable, and have students write their names on them.

☀️ Essential Questions

Review the essential questions for this session with students:

- How do communities make changes for the better?
- Why do people get involved?

## ⏻ Warm-Up: Community Changes | 10-15 min.

Taking Care of Our Community

1. Point out some of the different areas on the community map, such as businesses, houses, the zoo, the park, a farm, and the school.

   ❓ What do you think makes this community a place where people like to live?

   Accept all responses.

   ❓ Is there anything about the community that you dislike?

   Accept all responses without judging or dismissing the answers. Ask students to explain their dislike so other students can hear another perspective.

2. Use the following thought-provoking questions to lead a discussion about how change is brought about in a community:

   ❓ How do things in a community get changed if you don't like them or if you think they need to be fixed? (Use students' answers to the previous question as examples. Or use an example such as dilapidated school playground equipment.)

   ❓ How are problems solved when someone does not like the way things are going?

   ❓ What does it mean to be responsible?

   *Accept all ideas before defining **responsible.***

   💬 Being responsible is the quality of being dependable. People can depend on you to do what you say you are going to do.

3. Explain that when people are acting responsibly, they:

   - Do their best.
   - Keep their promises.
   - Plan ahead.
   - Take care of things.
   - Set a good example for others.

Select the flash card to reveal the definition.

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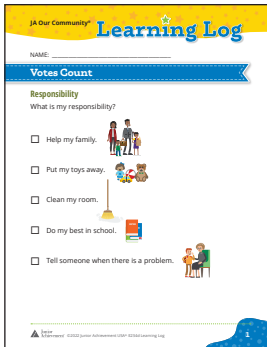
4. Direct students to the Responsibility section of their Learning Log pages. Depending on students' abilities, you can either:

- Read the list aloud, pausing a moment after each item for students to mark their Learning Logs.

  - Help my family.
  - Put my toys away.
  - Clean my room.
  - Do my best in school.
  - Tell someone when there is a problem.

- Give them about two minutes to circle or check off the items they are responsible for.

? **Who depends on you?**

Family, friends, teacher, school principal, neighbors, community members

5. Shift the discussion to responsibilities in the community.

? **If something needs to be cared for in a home, like replacing a light bulb that is not working, who is responsible for that?**

The family who lives there or the person who owns the building

? **If something breaks in a business, like a window or a faucet, who is responsible for fixing it?**

The person who owns the business

? **Who is responsible for taking care of something that is shared by the whole community, like the park?**

All the members of the community should care for the park. People in the community can pay someone to fix things when they are broken or to mow the grass, because it is a shared community place.

... **People who live in a community have the responsibility to help make the community a better place to live, work, play, and learn. Community members help make decisions about changes in their community.**

Problems in the Park

1. Direct students to the park map in the onscreen presentation.

2. Instruct students to look for things in the image that could be problems in the park.

? **What problems do you see in the park?**

Trash all over the park, dogs running loose, no wheelchair ramp, broken playground equipment, no benches, no trees/shade

Select the pictures to reveal text.

3. Record a list of problems as students share ideas on a whiteboard, easel, or blank online document.

4. Explain to students that the first part of helping change a community for the better is to identify problems that need solutions.

Activity: Solving Community Problems | 20–25 min.

1. Explain to students that problems need solutions. People need to think about which problems they can help solve that will benefit the community most.

💬 **We must decide which problem in the park we would like to help solve. The community has only enough money to fix one thing right now, so we need to pick one.**

2. Review the list that the class has created. Discuss the issues in more depth.

❓ **Which problems affects everyone in the community?**

❓ **How do other people in the community feel about this issue?**

3. Discuss why it is important to ask other community members what they think before trying to solve a community problem.

- People see issues from different viewpoints.
- People share ideas that you might not have thought about.
- Others might have information that you do not know.

💬 **Someone might think the park needs more trees and flowers. What about a person who has bad allergies to pollen? She might prefer fewer trees and flowers so her allergies don't act up in the park.**

💬 **You want to make changes that will help the most people. If you get input from others, it can help you make the best choice.**

💬 **Let's find out what other community members have to say.**

4. Select different community members in the park to get their perspectives. Read aloud, or have student volunteers read, the dialogue comments.

5. Review the list of problems the students originally created.
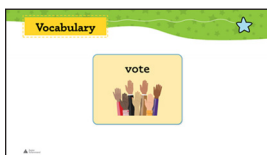
🖥️ **Select each person with an "i" icon.**

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> ❓ **Did any new problems surface after listening to community members?**
>
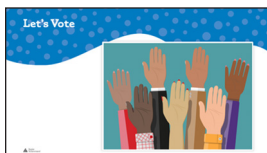> *Accept all responses. Add any new problems to the list.*
>
> ❓ **Did anyone tell us something we did not know?**
>
> ❓ **Which problems seem to be the most important?**

6. Work with students to select the top three problems to consider. Mark those three problems with letters A, B, C so students know which ones to vote for in the next step.
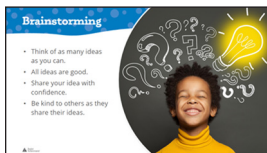
Let's Vote!

1. Review the key term **vote** (to make a decision on something important) briefly.

   > 💬 **Voting is a way for many people to help decide something important. Each person votes to express what he or she feels matters most.**

Select the flash card to show the definition.

2. Instruct students to vote on the problem they think the class should solve. Once the votes have been tallied and a choice has been made, note the problem to be solved. You may want to cross off the other issues to avoid confusion.

3. Announce which problem had the most votes and tell the class you will all think about how to solve that problem.

Facilitation Tip
Students should raise their hands or use a raised hand icon to vote.

Brainstorming

> 💬 **Now we are going to think of ideas to fix the problem in the park that we selected.**

1. Explain that brainstorming is an activity where people come up with as many ideas as they can in a short period of time. Brainstorming is a good way to help with problem solving.

2. Talk about the best way to brainstorm:

   - Think of as many ideas as you can.
   - All ideas are good ideas.
   - Share your idea with confidence.
   - Be kind to others as they share their ideas. The purpose is to gather ideas, not judge them.

   > 💬 **Remember that there are no bad ideas!**

3. Remind students that brainstorming works best when everyone takes turns and is polite and encouraging.

Facilitation Tip
Brainstorming can occur as a class or in small groups.

4. Brainstorm ideas as follows:

   - **Brainstorm and record**. Spend 3–5 minutes brainstorming ideas. Accept all answers, recording them as they are shared.
   - **Narrow down**. Read through the ideas and decide which ones are impossible. Eliminate impossibilities.
   - **Discuss**. Read through the list again, trying to narrow down the ideas by crossing out ideas that are too difficult, too expensive, or too impractical. Encourage students to discuss the ideas and contribute their thoughts and opinions.
   - **Narrow down again**. Circle two or three ideas that might work and discuss the benefits of each.
   - **Decide**. Instruct students to raise their hands to vote on the idea they think would best solve the problem.

5. Congratulate students on a job well done.

   💬 **When we vote, not everyone gets his or her own choice, but everyone gets to participate. That is your responsibility as a community member.**

🎁 Wrap-Up: How Can You Help? | 5 min.
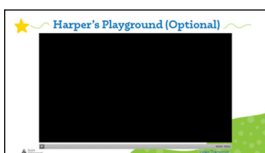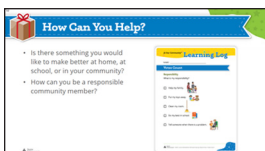
1. Discuss with students the importance of being involved in community decisions.

   ❓ **Is there something you would like to make better at home, at school, or in your community?**

   ❓ **How can you be a responsible community member?**

   Possible answers: Don't litter; pick up trash when you see it; help someone; be a friend; tell someone about a problem; fix something that is broken; pick up after your dog

2. Direct students to their Learning Log pages. Instruct students to draw a picture of something they would like to change in their own community. (Students can also use a blank piece of paper and drawing tools.)

3. (Optional) Play the video **Harper's Playground** to show students a story about how one family's desire to change a problem in their park resulted in an inclusive community solution.

Summing It Up

1. Explain to students that we all make our community a better place when we get involved to help fix problems.

2. Encourage students to share ways that they or their families have gotten involved to make the community a better place.

   - As necessary, suggest things such as taking dinner to a sick friend, volunteering at the food bank, or picking up trash.

🏠 Together at Home

Poster for Change

1. Encourage students to complete this activity at home with an adult.

   - Students will take a walk around their neighborhood with a family member and see if they can identify some problems.
   - They will make a list of any issues they see in their own neighborhood.
   - They will choose one problem and create a poster to make neighbors aware of the problem (e.g., if they see a lot of trash, they could create a poster about always putting trash in the trash can).

2. Encourage students to take home their Learning Log to share and complete their work with a close friend or family member.

3. Wrap up the session by congratulating students on their work.