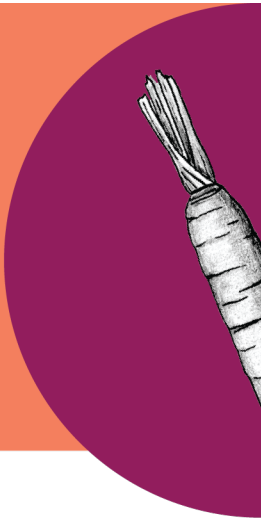



THE EDIBLE
SCHOOLYARD
PROJECT



SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS
[TEACHER RESOURCE]



Summary: The final inquiry project of the [Understanding Organic](#) curriculum encourages students to begin identifying ways they might want to impact change around issues of organic. [The Introduction to the Final Project](#) lesson was designed to serve as a preparatory lesson for what could become a social action project. This resource offers additional information around social action projects and provides links to further resources and curricula. Read on to learn more, including what social action projects can achieve, what a social action project is, how to plan a social action project, and some considerations to take when developing a social action project.

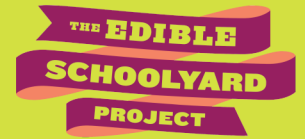
Note:

- This resource was developed for Edible Schoolyard Project's [Understanding Organic](#) curriculum and is part of the appendices of the curriculum.



SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

[TEACHER RESOURCE]



Why Social Action Projects?

Social action projects serve dual purposes—to address injustice in students’ worlds, and to act as a powerful learning tool. Social action projects are beneficial to the learning environment. They require a level of analysis, conceptual integration, and application that lead to deep learning and growth. They can also increase student engagement by asking them to build their learning from their own interests and curiosity. The classroom can become a useful site for social engagement. Social action projects allow students and teachers the opportunity to have an impact on the issues that affect them.

The learning potential of social action projects is valuable, and it is important to recognize the preexisting knowledge that students carry with them into the classroom. Students are sometimes regarded as “in progress” towards their future selves, but this perspective discounts the impact that they can have in the present. With social action projects, students bring their experiences, knowledge, interests, and passions to the classroom, and they can leverage their unique understandings and gifts to make change where it matters. Social action projects allow a class to grow towards the future while impacting the current conditions through direct action.

What are Social Action Projects?

Social action projects emerged from ideas of social action, defined as “a process whereby individuals within social groups work collectively to confront or dismantle societal or community oppression and injustices” (Tores-Harding et al., 2017). Social Action Projects are multi-step projects led and carried out by students in order to address an issue or concern in their community(ies). They are meant to give students the opportunity to deepen their learning by building skills and knowledge “in the real world” and to contribute to students’ active citizenship. Social action projects generally require a significant time commitment to provide space for all the processes needed between developing an idea and completing an action. However, many of the strategies of social action projects are useful to implement alongside what you are already teaching, even if you will not complete the entire project cycle.



SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

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Steps of Social Action Projects



Image One: Steps of Social Action Projects (ESY, 2021)

The steps of a social action project are cyclical and iterative by nature. Depending on the project, some steps may be completed only once, or many times, and they may not all happen in the exact order depicted in the diagram above. For example, a student may move through steps one and two, only to discover while creating an action plan for step three, that they still are missing crucial information or perspectives for their planning— then they might jump back to step two to gather more information, and then return to creating an action plan with that new information in hand. However, in general, this five-step cycle offers a helpful framework for structuring how your students can engage in a social action project.

Consider sharing the diagram above with students at the outset of the project and having them refer to it again once they have finished. Have them compare their actual process to the one depicted in the diagram. Then ask them to create a diagram that depicts their actual process. Below, you can read, in greater detail, how each of the five steps might take shape in your classroom.

Brainstorming and Topic Selection

- This part of the process depends on your class and curriculum. The curriculum might have covered a set of issues that could provide a jumping off point for social action projects, or it might have developed useful skills that could be leveraged for a particular type of project. Take time to consider which topics would help to deepen and personalize student knowledge of the curriculum. Make sure to brainstorm topics as a class, allowing student interest and ideas to guide you towards the topic(s) you will focus on.

Understanding the Issue

- The next step of a social action project involves information gathering. Students should develop open-ended research questions about the chosen topic(s) and practice research methods to seek answers. Using interviews, observation, surveys, internet research, and other qualitative and quantitative methods, students can improve their skills while developing a fuller picture of their chosen topic.

Creating an Action Plan

- In this stage of the process, students make decisions around their chosen audience, tactics, tools, and timeline. They should consider the skills they will need to build, the resources they will need, and the people they will need to talk to in order to carry out their project. It may also be helpful in this stage to practice resource mapping, in which students can consider the assets that they have available to them in the classroom and their communities and reflect on how those assets can be used to help them complete their projects.

Taking Action

- Time to bring the projects to life! In this stage, the teacher can act as a resource to help students problem solve, shift their plans if necessary, and work through any conflicts or inequity within the groups. Students will take the lead and enact their projects.

Evaluating and Reflecting

- Students should measure the success of their projects using evaluative methods appropriate to their projects. If there are external stakeholders, students should offer them the chance to evaluate the projects. All social action projects should include some element of reflection on the parts of the students. What was their goal at the outset and how did it match up with the end result? What difficulties did they encounter? What surprises came up along the way? What did they learn from the process and what might they do differently?

Important Considerations When Engaging with Social Action Projects

To ensure effective and engaging social action projects, it is worthwhile to take some time to consider the students, the curriculum, and the environment.

Student Interest and Investment

Social action projects should be relevant to the lives, interests, and needs of the students. Rather than guessing what might interest students, have them generate ideas, research, and select the topics that most intrigue them. Let their interests and experiences inspire them to take action towards something they care about.

Curriculum Aims

It is important that the projects be engaging to students, but it is also worth tailoring projects to your curriculum to ensure that they support the desired learning outcomes. If certain skills are required, consider how can you assist students to practice them before and during the project? If certain foundational information would be useful, how can you fill knowledge gaps for the class? Finally, which sorts of projects might you explore that could build on and expand upon the class curriculum and deepen understanding of concepts that have already been addressed?

External Environment

The environment in which you perform social action projects can vary based on the people, political climate, the location, timing, and a range of other factors. Consider your students' community(ies)-- what are their needs and how might they be impacted by your social action project(s)? Which local or national events might cause unexpected conflicts or opportunities for engagement? What resources exist in your environment that students can take advantage of when carrying out their projects?

Resources on Social Action Projects:

Curricula

These resources provide curricular tools for carrying out a social action project.

- [Join the Conversation](#)
- [Make it Happen: Social Action Toolkit](#)
- [Social Media for Social Action](#)

Teacher Resources

Theory and frameworks behind social action projects.

- [Social Action Projects: Making a Difference](#)
- [What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy](#) (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004)
- [The Sources of Adolescent Activism](#) (Hart & Gullan, 2010)
- [Learning Through Resistance](#) (Pacheco, 2012)

Examples of Social Action Projects

Ideas to serve as inspiration for future social action projects.

- [10 Community Action Project Ideas](#)
- [Children as Agents of Social and Community Change](#)

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STEPS OF SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

Name: _____

