

Who We Are

A Teenager's Survival Guide to Our Town

Project Description for Teachers

SUMMARY

This is an extended, multi-activity project that should be worked on over a number of weeks. Students will create a practical 8-16 page guide for other teenagers that provides information and tips about ways to “survive” growing up in the local community. It will include articles about resources available to teenagers as well as tips and “How To” information for things such as getting a driver’s license, succeeding in school, preparing for a test, finding the school that’s best for you, managing stress in your life, mediating conflict, and getting help to deal with problems.

To develop this document, students will identify what topics they want to work on, work in groups to determine how best to approach their topic, research the topic, gather pictures and other graphics, prepare and revise drafts, discuss how to combine topics into a coherent whole. This project description assumes that a single document will be produced as a collaboration between all of the students involved, however, other options could be considered.

Students will gain a better understanding of their community, practice conducting research and working productively in groups, improve computer design and publishing skills, engage text through reading and writing, and develop editing and critical thinking skills.

ACTIVITIES

1. Introduction to Project

Teacher explains project in general and indicates the steps to be taken in development of a Teenagers’ Survival Guide to Our Town. Teacher explains that the project will be divided into discreet sections and that small groups (from 2-5 students) will work on separate sections. Teacher emphasizes that this is a serious project in which student performance will be reviewed based on a combination of their individual, small group, and whole group performance. Students are told that the product will be printed and distributed to other

teenagers and may be published on the Web, so it must meet high standards for content and design. Teacher summarizes and hands out a description of the project and asks students if they understand and have any questions or comments.

Resource: Teenager's Guide Project Description for Students

2. Research Activity: Conduct Survey of Teenagers' Interests

In order to frame the discussion about what topics to include in the survival guide, students will conduct a survey of themselves and other teenagers to identify topics of interest to young people. The surveys will relate to potential sections of a Teenagers' Survival Guide. In small groups the students will interview each other using the survey and also discuss whether other questions should be added to the questionnaire. They will tabulate the results of the survey in their small groups and then report back to the whole group where total class results are tabulated. As a whole group, students will discuss the implications of their findings as they relate to the Teenagers' Guide.

Resource: A Teenager's Guide Questionnaire

Extension Activity: The survey may be revised based on the group discussion. Students may then be asked to survey their friends after school to get further input into what topics are of interest to young people in our town. These could be discussed the following day

3. Planning Activity: Discussion and Brainstorming of Survival Guide Topics

Teacher leads discussion to identify potential sections of the guide. Teacher writes question for brainstorm at the top of the board: "What topics do we want to include in the Students' Survival Guide?" The discussion follows a standard "brainstorming" model, which is discussed in advance by the teacher. (See How We Think and Learn: Brainstorming Guidelines.) Students are asked to look at what topics were most popular on the survey. These are listed on the board. Students are asked to suggest other topics they think would be interesting. Teacher facilitates brainstorming and suggests some topics when the discussion slows. (See Sample Topics List at the end of this document.) After listing as many options as possible, students are asked to "vote" for their favourite topics by putting three sticky dots next to their top 3 choices. Some topics that have little support could then be eliminated.

It may not be possible to fully determine what the topics will be. However, the teacher will help the students to identify those topics that have most support. In

the end, in the role of editor and chief, the teacher will decide which topics to include in the guide if there is not a clear consensus by the group.

Resource: How We Think and Learn: Brainstorming Guidelines

Resource: Sample Topics List (at end of document)

4. Planning Activity: Assignment of Topics to Students

After the topics have been gleaned to a reasonable size (approximately 8-12), the teacher lists these topics on the board and asks students to write their names next to the two topics they would like to work on. They should write a one or two next to their first and second choices. The teacher then determines which students will work on which topics, attempting to honor at least one of their choices. Teams will be comprised of from 2 to 4 students based on the complexity of the topic and the capacities of the students. Teacher will take care in creating work groups that are as potentially productive as possible. After the assignments have been made, students are asked to meet in their topic groups to discuss and complete an outline of the topic and production process.

5. Planning Activity: Planning Approach to Topic

The teacher describes his or her basic expectations for the students' work. Teacher may provide a specific outline of the work to be done plus performance standards or leave it more open-ended. Students meet in their workgroups to discuss their assignment and outline their approach to the subject, a basic work plan, and individual responsibilities. Students may have to conduct some research prior to completing their work plan. Students should be encouraged to be thoughtful in the preparation of their work plan, since they will be held accountable for meeting it. The teacher must review and approve all work plans prior to students beginning their work on the topic. Teachers and other staff should help the students to think through their project, helping them to make it as interesting as possible while keeping it achievable. Teachers may add interim reviews in the work plans. These are points in the project that students must present draft materials to staff for review prior to going forward. These will vary by topic. Students are responsible for typing up the finalized work plan and are expected to check off items as they are completed.

Work plans may be changed from time to time but changes must be approved by the teacher. Teacher should explain that this is a common practice in many jobs from building a house to fixing a car. Students will need to set up their filing systems, both physical and on their hard drives, to keep and share information they are collecting. This is something they should discuss and determine together.

Resource: Creating a Publication Planning and Performance Standards Rubric

6. Project Activity: Gathering Information/Conducting Research

Students meet in their groups to work through their work plans. Depending on the topic, students may need to interview people in the community, conduct research on the Internet, gather and reproduce information from other documents, or take pictures. Staff will assist students to make contacts and gather their information. Students may refer to one or another guide that helps them think through how they will gather information. After they have collected necessary information, students are ready to prepare their rough draft.

7. Project Activity: Developing Rough Draft of Topic

After conducting necessary research and having it approved by the teacher, students may begin working on their rough draft. Unless otherwise determined, students should limit their topic to one page. Ultimately, pages will be expected to fit into an overall look and feel for the entire product, but for now they should experiment with what they think works best for their individual topic. Staff work with topic groups to help them think through and produce their rough draft.

8. Project Activity: Editorial Review and Overall Document Design Standards

Students select representatives to meet on an editorial committee to make decisions about the overall design and content of the document. From 2-5 members should suffice. This group will meet between classes when possible or at other times to decide what articles should go where and what can be done to make the overall document look consistent. The teacher, as the executive editor, will resolve any disputes, but students should be encouraged to seek to resolve differences cooperatively. The editorial committee should specify basic design standards for the whole document by the end of the rough draft period, although there should be an effort to allow as much creativity as possible on individual pages.

9. Project Activity: Completion of Final Draft

Students work on their final drafts, making sure to review how well they meet the document design standards issued by the editorial committee and how they meet the performance standards specified in the Project Standards Form. Drafts are submitted to the editorial committee for review and modified as requested. Students complete a self-evaluation.

10. Completion and Distribution of Final Document

The final document is completed and printed. Depending on the success of the project, copies are distributed to appropriate audiences.

Extension Activity: Participants create PowerPoint presentation about their topics and present to other groups or classes.

SAMPLE TOPICS LIST

To the extent possible, ideas for content for the survival guide should be elicited from students. However, it may be necessary to “prime the pump” to stimulate ideas. Here are a few ideas in no particular order:

Best places for:

- Getting cheap and decent food
- Hanging out and using the Internet
- Shopping for cool and affordable clothes
- Listening to music
- Getting your mind straight
- Getting help
- Getting a part-time job

How to:

- Manage stress
- Succeed in school
- Cope with bullies
- Pass a test
- Write a winning essay
- Deal with a bully
- Help save the local environment
- Get a driver’s license
- Avoid drugs
- Deal with racism
- Survive a dog attack
- Find the best deals on gear
- Trouble-shoot a stalled car
- Get around using public transportation
- Get help for family problems
- Control anger
- Get a date
- Parallel park
- Find what you need on the Web
- Get a passport