



America's Future

Objectives

- Students will **reflect** on and identify what America means to them and what they want for America's future.
- Students will **explain** what it means to be an active member of the community.
- Students will **identify** areas for improvement in their own community based on their hopes for America.
- Students will **create** an action plan to help make their community better for everyone.

Overview

In this lesson, students will explore their role in shaping the future of their community and America at large. They will start by sharing their thoughts on what America means to them and their hopes for the nation's future. They will also learn about the concept of active citizenship, which dates all the way back to America's independence. Through readings and discussions, students will discover examples of active citizenship in America's past and present. Students will then work in groups to create plans to get involved in their community or work toward positive changes as they collaborate to be active citizens who strive to make America the best it can be. Finally, students will use their new understanding to submit an entry to the America's Field Trip contest sponsored by America250—the nonpartisan initiative established by Congress to orchestrate a commemoration of the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, also known as the Semiquincentennial.

America's Field Trip Contest Overview

America250 is inviting elementary, middle, and high school students to share their perspectives on America 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Students can submit artwork, poems, essays, and more articulating what America means to them. First-place award recipients will be able to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime "field trip" experience at one of the nation's most iconic cultural landmarks and institutions, and second-place awardees will receive a cash award. First-place awardees and their designated chaperone will receive travel and lodging accommodations for their selected trip. For more information about America's Field Trip, contest rules, and field trip experiences for awardees, please visit <https://america250.org/fieldtrip>.

Time

45–60 minutes

The timing of the activities may vary by classroom. Consider how this activity and submission to the contest could be split into multiple days or used in collaboration with other educators across your school.

Materials

- America's Field Trip Contest Submission Information
- Handout: *Reflection*, one for each student group of three
- Handout: *Civic Action*, one per student
- Handout: *Community Plan*, one for each student group of three
- All handouts in [Google Slides](#)

Teacher Preparation

- **Content:** Read through the activity and handouts beforehand to consider the adaptations necessary for your students' needs. These may take the form of additional scaffolds for reading or additional civic examples relevant to your community and student interests.

Procedure

1. Warm Up: Begin by dividing students into groups of three or four and distribute a **Reflection Handout** to each group. Read the headers on the flag and give groups a few minutes to brainstorm responses to each prompt and jot them in the flag's stripes. Tell students that notes and ideas are fine, and that complete sentences are unnecessary!
2. As students are working, remind them that they can also consider what they have seen on television, places they have traveled, parts of their community, or what they have read in books.
3. Then bring the class back together and ask students to share out loud some of their ideas by filling in the blanks: To me, America means _____. In the future, I hope America _____.
4. Then ask: *Who* is responsible for America's future? Call on several students to share their ideas. Help direct students towards understanding how each of them is empowered to shape America's future, and that it starts with their own community.
5. Next, write the following quote on the board:
*The world of the future is in **our** making. Tomorrow is now.*
—Eleanor Roosevelt

Teacher Note:

For this activity, civic engagement addresses being a contributing member of your community, not citizenship status.

6. Ask for students' reactions to the quote. Then explain that Eleanor Roosevelt was First Lady of the United States when her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was our country's 32nd President. She encouraged all Americans to be active in their community by helping and supporting one another in many ways.
7. Go on to explain that this idea of active citizenship goes all the way back to America's beginnings. In 1791, shortly after America's independence, a group of leaders wrote the Bill of Rights to make sure that people's rights—like freedom of speech and religion—were protected by our government. The Bill of Rights ensured that Americans would always have the right to speak up and take action encouraging them to be active citizens. America still follows the Bill of Rights today. Being civically engaged means more than taking a big action—it can also look like:
 - a. Celebrating members of our community and nation
 - b. Making sure others feel welcome
 - c. Picking up litter in your school or community
 - d. Talking with someone about their day
 - e. Sharing your opinion on a topic while listening to their views
8. Pass out the **Civic Action handout** to each student. Call on students to help you read each blurb and encourage the class to annotate (highlight or underline) for information that helps them better understand the term *active citizen*. If necessary, read sections of the handout with students while helping make connections to big and small examples of how students could be engaged in their community.
9. Then, instruct students to look back at what they said America means to them and what they want for America's future. Explain that it is their job, as active citizens, to help America continue to be the country they want it to be! Today, student groups will create a plan to help their community work toward the future that they envision.
10. Take a moment to help students define the word *community*. Tell them that a community is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Based on this definition, ask them to identify communities they are a part of and help them understand that their class, school, neighborhood, town, etc., are all examples of communities!
11. Ask students to assemble into their groups from the beginning of the class session. Distribute the **Community Plan** to each group and review each step. Remind students of the ideas at the bottom of their **Civic Action handout** and encourage them to think of small changes to make their community better for those who live, work, or play there. Also, ask students to consider "why" it is important to help others in their community.
12. With time left in the class session, bring students back together. Encourage groups to share the goals they recorded and then reflect on the following question: How will your community plan help us work toward the future that you want for America?

13. Continue the activity by sharing with students that they will have the option of creating either a piece of artwork, essay, or poem that they feel answers the prompt “what does America mean to me?” The artwork option can be created using a variety of mediums or even a digital drawing. The essay or poem can be up to 100 words. Please refer to the **Contest Submission Information Handout** for more information on the submission guidelines. Additional support ideas include the following:

- Provide students time over the next few days to work on their contest submission.
- Share the opportunity with other teachers, including the art teacher if available.
- Send a communication home to families and caregivers about the contest, along with the **Contest Submission Information Handout**.

Frameworks & Standards


Educating for American Democracy Framework:

- CDQ5.2 A: What are the institutional and non-institutional ways that people have made changes to society?
- CSGQ5.2 A: How can groups and individuals transform the United States?
- CSGQ5.2 E: What civic virtues and values are needed for people to make change together?

C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation and draw implications for how individuals should participate.
- D2.Civ.7.3-5. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school settings.
- D2.Civ.10.3-5. Identify the beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and values that underlie their own and others' points of view about civic issues.

Use this [American flag interactive student handout](#) to type your responses into the flag.

	What do you think of when you think of America?
	What does America mean to YOU?
What hopes do you have for America's future?	

Civic action has been a BIG part of our country's history...take a look at how both young and older Americans have made a difference!

Discussion: In 1787, a group of leaders called the Founding Fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, which is the set of rules that America still uses today! While the Founding Fathers didn't always agree, they explained their ideas, listened to each other, and made decisions together. In fact, Americans are still discussing and debating these ideas today.

Volunteering: After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans about 20 years ago, volunteers helped clean up the city and rebuild homes. Their hard work showed the difference that volunteers can make after a disaster.

Writing Letters: Writing letters, whether to elected officials or community members, can create change. One elementary school in Kentucky, for example, started the Kindness Project, where students wrote kind letters to their classmates once a week. The project aimed to make people smile and bring them back together after they had to stay apart because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizing Community Events: Every year in California, thousands of people participate in the Coastal Cleanup Day and pick up trash along California's coast and waterways. This helps keep the water clean and safe for both animals and people!

What other ways have you seen people making a difference in your community?

Write your response here...

What is civic action?

Civic action is an important part of America's past, present, and future.

Civic action is when someone helps make their community and country better. They care about what happens around them, share their thoughts, listen to others, celebrate community or national heroes, and discuss big ideas. They also work with others to make a difference. Where do you see this taking place in your school or community?

How do YOU want to get involved in America's future?

Think about small but meaningful ways that you could make a difference in your classroom, your school, your neighborhood, or your town or city.

How could you help make people feel like they belong?

How could you help your community stay clean?

How could you celebrate others?

Now it's your turn to be an active citizen! Follow the steps below to create a plan to improve your community. Be sure to tell your group members your ideas, listen to theirs, and then talk about everyone's ideas together.

Community Need: Think about the everyday lives of people in your community. (Remember that your community could be your classroom, school, neighborhood, town, or city.)

- What is something that can be improved to make your community better to live, work, or play?
- Why do you think it needs to be improved?



Goal: What is one change you could make to help solve this problem? (Start small: Even small changes can make a big difference!) Why is this change a good solution?



Materials Needed: Will you need any materials to make your plan happen? If so, what?



Action Plan: How will you make this change happen? Break your idea down into smaller steps!

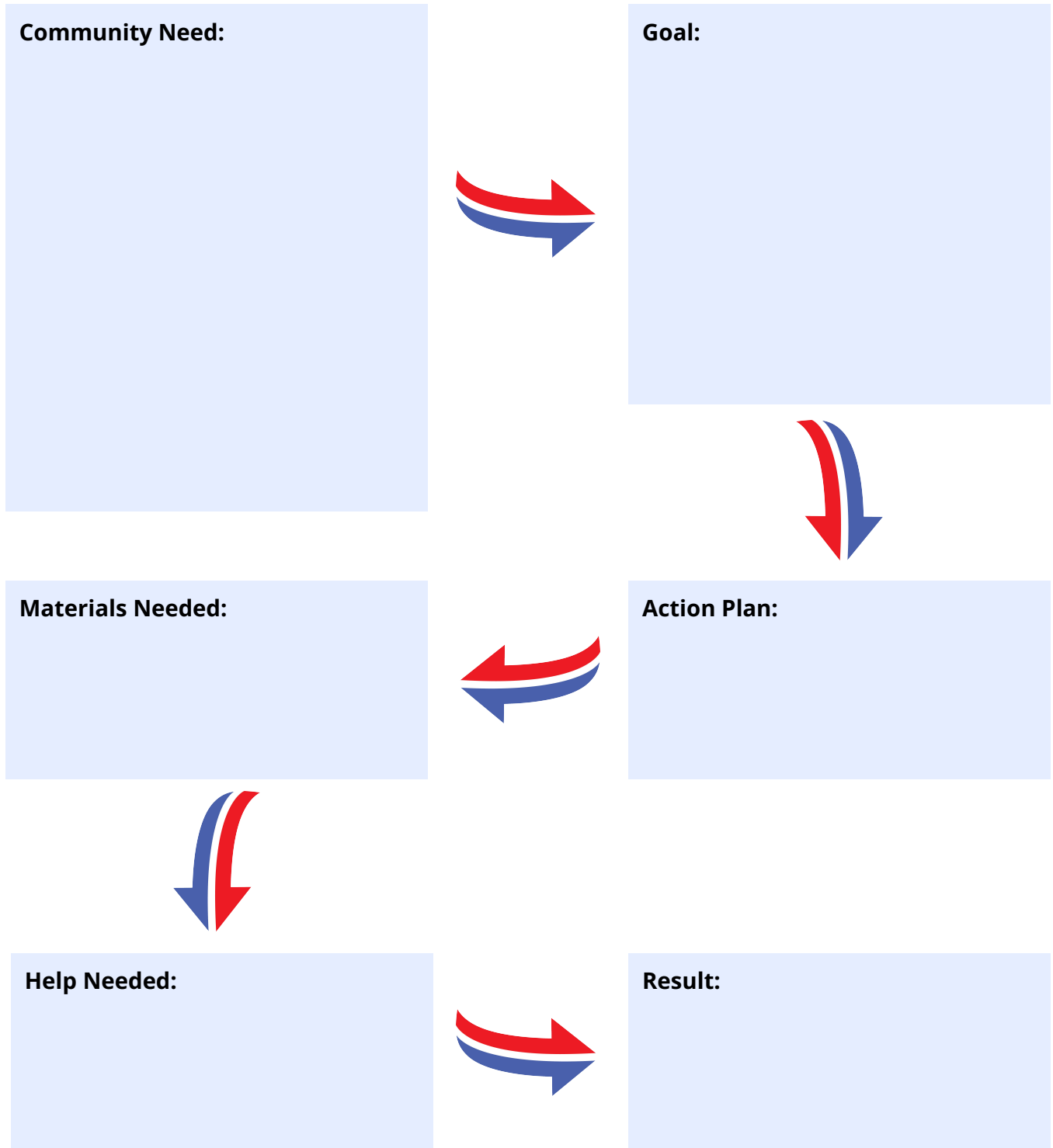


Help Needed: Are there any other people that could help make your plan happen? If so, who?



Result: How will your plan make your community better for the people who live, work, or play there?

Now it's your turn to be an active citizen! Follow the steps below to create a plan to improve your community. Be sure to tell your group members your ideas, listen to theirs, and then talk about everyone's ideas together.



[America's Field Trip](#) is a nationwide student contest sponsored by **America250**, the official nonpartisan entity charged by Congress with planning the nation's Semiquincentennial in 2026, also known as the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. America's Field Trip invites students in grades 3–12 to be part of this historic milestone by sharing their perspectives on what America means to them—with the chance to earn a once-in-a-lifetime field trip experience at an iconic American landmark or cultural site, including the Smithsonian's National Zoo, National Archives Museum, Kennedy Space Center, and Yellowstone National Park—just to name a few.

Official Rules can be found at america250.org/FieldTrip/Rules.

- **Submission Deadline:** April 16, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. ET
- **Eligibility:** Any student in grades 3–12 who is a legal resident of any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or the U.S. territories is eligible to enter. First- and second-prize awardees from the 2024 America250 America's Field Trip contest, which ended on May 17, 2024 are not eligible to enter or win.
- **Requirements:** Students at each grade level may create artwork, including physical artwork, that is submitted through a high-res photo, digital drawing, or an essay.
 - Students in grades 3–5 may submit writing up to 100 words
 - Students in grades 6–8 may submit writing up to 250 words
 - Students in grades 9–12 may submit writing up to 500 words
- **Judging Criteria:** A panel of current and former educators will evaluate submissions based on **Clarity of Idea** (25%), **Student Voice** (50%), and **Presentation** (25%).
- **Prizes:** 25 first-place awardees from each grade level category and their designated chaperone will receive travel and lodging accommodations for a three-day, two-night trip to a select historical or cultural site. 25 second-place awardees from each grade level category will each receive a \$500 cash award. Award recipients will be announced in May 2025, and field trips will take place in July and August 2025.

How to Enter the America's Field Trip Contest

Students at each grade level will respond to the prompt, "What does America mean to you?" with artwork or an essay. Students must develop submissions individually.

Students must have a teacher, parent, or legal guardian submit their entry through the application portal at america250.org/FieldTrip/Application. A teacher may only submit an entry on behalf of a student with written permission from that student's parent or legal guardian.

For more information about America's Field Trip, including official contest rules, 2025 field trip locations, judging criteria, submission thought starters, classroom activities, and Spanish-language resources, please visit america250.org/FieldTrip or scan the QR code.

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