

# **Caring for the Community**

**Lesson Video: Grades K-2**

# Overview

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**Teacher:** Debbie Lerner  
**Grades:** 1-3  
**School:** Red Bridge Elementary School  
**Location:** Kansas City, Missouri

**NCSS Standards-Based Themes: Civic Ideals and Practices**

**Content Standards: Civics**

## Video Summary

For students in Debbie Lerner’s multiage classroom, the remodeling of their school is an opportunity to learn how individuals can contribute to a community project. In this lesson, students learn where funding for such a project comes from, discuss the procedures involved in planning and executing a school remodeling project, identify the resources necessary to complete the job, and research ways they can help with the effort. In addition, Ms. Lerner uses the school’s building project to teach concepts like cooperation, and to encourage students to become active members of their school community.

Ms. Lerner invites the district superintendent to visit the class and talk to students about the remodeling project, tell them what they can do to help, and answer any questions they have. Then students work in groups to plan their contribution to the project: packing up their classroom before the remodeling begins. They also prepare speeches and make posters to enlist the help of students in other classrooms. By inviting guest speakers to their class, forming planning committees, and recruiting their schoolmates to help, Ms. Lerner’s students become active participants in a community project.

## Standards

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*Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for elementary school students:

### **X. Civic Ideals and Practices**

Locate, access, organize, and apply information about an issue of public concern from multiple points of view; identify and practice selected forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic; recognize and interpret how the “common good” can be strengthened through various forms of citizen action.

**Content Standards: Civics**

# About the Class

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## Classroom Profile

“This lesson was designed to help students find ways in which they can be helpful in the community. I wanted them to understand that they can make a difference, that they’re growing up to be the caretakers of their community. I also wanted them to understand and value the inter-relatedness of a project like this—that things don’t happen in isolation.” —Debbie Lerner

Debbie Lerner teaches a class of first-, second-, and third-graders at the Red Bridge Elementary School in Kansas City, Missouri. Located in a suburban bedroom community that was established in the 1950s, the school serves an increasingly diverse population on the outskirts of Kansas City. The school’s multiage class structure was modeled after the open classroom style of the World War II-era British Infant Schools, and follows the philosophy that learning expands with a variety of classroom experiences.

Ms. Lerner’s students began the year by examining the concept of rules: in the home, the classroom, the community, our country, and the world. Using this thematic approach, Ms. Lerner taught first-graders the basic concept of rules—such as what they are and why we have them—while challenging third-graders with more complex ideas—such as how rules differ from one household/classroom/community/country to another. After the unit on rules, the class went on to examine citizenship, and then to explore different cultures and traditions in a unit on holidays.

The lesson shown in “Caring for the Community” fell within a unit on service learning. By the time Ms. Lerner’s class started the lesson, they had already completed units on community and the built environment. Ms. Lerner expected her students to be able to explain what makes up a community, identify different kinds of communities, and understand what it means to be part of a community. She then used the proposed remodeling of Red Bridge Elementary School to teach students about the wide range of needs in their own community, the resources that are available to meet those needs, and the procedures that must be followed in allocating the resources. Most importantly, she used the remodeling project to help them discover what they could do to make a difference in their community.

Year at a Glance
Why Do We Have Rules?
What Is a Citizen?
Holidays
Community
The Built Environment
Service Learning
Economics and History

## Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

### Content: Identifying Needs and Resources

A community project is an opportunity for students to learn about the needs, resources, jobs, and laws in their city or town. By studying a school remodeling project, students in Ms. Lerner’s class learned about the structure and role of the school district, how the school’s remodeling needs were identified, the people involved in each step of the project, and the jobs those people performed. Listed below are some guiding questions to ask when studying the needs and resources of any community project:

- What is the scope of the project?
- Why was the project started?
- What is the history of the project? Research the stages of the project and make a timeline.
- Who are the people in charge of the project?

# About the Class, cont'd.

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- Who will benefit from the project and what are some of the different ways that different groups of people will benefit? (For example, students and teachers will benefit from the school remodeling project, as will the workers and head of the construction company.)
- Will anybody be hurt by the project? (For example, is there another project that won't be funded because of the school remodeling project? Are there environmental concerns related to the project? Will anyone be displaced because of the remodeling?) How do you balance the needs of these competing groups?
- Who might the class invite in to discuss the project?
- What are the jobs involved in completing the project?
- What does the project cost? How will it be paid for?
- What are some ways that students can get involved?

You might also consider any issues and questions the project raises, background knowledge needed, and how different community resources are to be impacted. For other models and information on student involvement in the community, see the Resources at the end of this chapter.

## **Teaching Strategy: Teaching a Multiage Class**

In a multiage class, learning is promoted by taking advantage of the diversity of the learners. Units are organized thematically, and students at each grade level work on different assignments within the unit. Students are encouraged to help each other in a nurturing environment and to value differences between students of different ages and ability levels. In cooperative work, older students become role models and mentors to the younger learners.

Teachers in multiage classrooms are encouraged to use a range of teaching and assessment strategies to address the different ages of their students, implement flexible patterns of grouping, accommodate specific learning goals, engage all students in active participation, and promote a climate of respect for oneself and others.

# Watching the Video

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As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

## Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- How do you define service learning? How is service learning different from community volunteer work?
- What does a teacher need to consider in helping students become involved in a community project?
- What are some ways to connect social studies to issues and projects in the school or community?
- How does students' understanding of social studies concepts like community involvement change across different grade levels? What does a teacher need to think about when planning lessons that include different age groups?

## Watch the Video

As you watch "Caring for the Community," take notes on Ms. Lerner's instructional strategies. Note what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

## Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background, preparation, strategies, and materials used in the lesson?
- Consider the ways in which this class is different from yours. How might you introduce a service learning project in your own community?
- What prior learning experiences did students need in order to succeed in this lesson?
- What was especially effective about the way Ms. Lerner taught social studies in this multiage classroom?
- How are the learning needs of all the students in Ms. Lerner's multiage classroom addressed? What evidence indicates that Ms. Lerner is aware of the range of needs in her multiage classroom?

# Watching the Video, cont'd.

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## Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Ms. Lerner's lesson.



### Addressing Misconceptions: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately seven minutes into the video. Watch for about seven minutes.

Students have prepared questions about the school's remodeling project and invited the district superintendent to visit the class and discuss the project. The conversation with the superintendent addresses the students' questions, but it also reveals some misconceptions that the students have.

- What misconceptions do the students have? How are they addressed?
- Why is it important to address students' misconceptions?
- How would you address the same misconceptions?
- What evidence is there that the students' misconceptions will not or do not persist after the conversation with the superintendent?



### Multiage Group Work: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 15 minutes into the video. Watch for about five minutes.

Students work in steering committees to brainstorm possible community resources and to consider whom they might enlist to help with the project.

- How does Ms. Lerner prepare students for group work?
- How does the structure of the groups ensure success for individual students?
- What evidence do you see of different-age students working successfully together?

# Connecting to Your Teaching

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## Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- How might you identify and use service learning opportunities to help students understand more about their own community?
- How do you plan for a guest speaker in your classroom? How do you prepare students for a guest speaker? How do you prepare the speaker?
- What are some different skill level issues that you address in your own classroom? What strategies have you found most successful in addressing these issues?
- What advice would you give to a teacher who is planning to engage students in identifying a community-based project?

## Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Ask students to research a topic and develop a way to present the information to others. For example, students might create a booklet on Black History Month to display in the library.
- Have students share what they have learned about the topic with younger or older students. Then ask your students how sharing their knowledge can be a service to others in their school community.
- Have students collect newspaper articles about individuals or groups involved in a community project. Make a bulletin board or display titled People Who Make a Difference, and ask students to nominate classmates, schoolmates, or people in the community to include on the bulletin board.
- Ask students to identify contributions they can make in their classroom, school, and community, and then have students make that contribution as part of a class project.

# Resources

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## Print Resources for Students

Kalman, Bobby, and Niki Walker. *Community Helpers from A to Z*. AlphaBasiCs. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 1997.

## Print Resources for Teachers and Students

Burton, Virginia Lee. *The Little House*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978.

Miller, Bruce A. *Children at the Center: Implementing the Multiage Classroom*. Eugene, Ore.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 2001.

Stone, Sandra J. *Creating the Multiage Classroom*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1996.

Tomlinson, Carol Ann. *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999.

## Web Resources for Students and Teachers

Center for Understanding the Built Environment: <http://www.cubekc.org>

This site focuses on curriculum resources and community outreach projects for students and teachers.

## Web Resources for Teachers

The Giraffe Project: <http://www.giraffe.org>

This service learning curriculum features community builders and motivational speakers on a broad range of topics.

KIDS: Kids Involved Doing Service: <http://kidsconsortium.org/>

The KIDS Consortium specializes in the service-learning movement as a way to strengthen school and communities.

Multiage-Education.Com: <http://www.multiage-education.com>

Geared towards educators, this site offers step-by-step information on setting up and running a multiage classroom.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory:

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in500.htm>

NCREL's site concentrates on the history and development of enhanced learning through multiage grouping in schools.