



IT'S UP TO US TO STICK OUR NECKS OUT

"I became more courageous by doing the very things I needed to be courageous for. First, a little and badly. Then bit by bit, more and better."

—Audre Lorde

OVERVIEW

Students “hear the story,” “tell the story,” and “be the story,” becoming inspired by everyday heroes, then choose, organize, and carry out a service project to address a problem they care about.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As a service learning project
- Anytime, to inspire compassionate and brave action

TIME REQUIRED

- Multiple Sessions

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- [Giraffe Heroes](#): a resource of over a thousand stories of “Giraffes,” everyday heroes who stuck their necks out to make things better.
- The Giraffe Heroes Project program [It's Up to Us](#). This guide provides full instructions, answers to questions, and valuable resources for any service project.

- Video, computers, and social media, as desired and appropriate

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- **Hear the Story**—become inspired by listening to, watching, or reading the stories of Giraffe Heroes
- **Tell the Story** - find similar heroes in books, in the media, and in their own communities—and tell those stories in class
- **Be The Story**—decide on a public problem that needs fixing, and organize and carry out a service project to address it, becoming their own story of courageous, compassionate action

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Peruse the [Giraffe Heroes Project site](#) and read a few stories of heroes who stuck their necks out.
- Each Giraffe has taken on a public problem and worked on solving it. Think about the risks they took, and how caring they were.

INSTRUCTIONS

PREPARATION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Explore the [Giraffe Heroes Project](#) site, and select two or three stories that inspire you and that would be appropriate to share with your students.
- Also review the program [It's Up to Us](#), selecting portions to use as resources for the service learning project you will facilitate.

SESSION 1: HEAR THE STORY, TELL THE STORY

- Tell the stories of at least two Giraffes from the [Giraffe Heroes Project](#) website.
- Spark a class discussion about the Giraffes, the risks they took, and the common good that their actions served. Tell students that "Giraffe" heroes stick their necks out for others.
- In groups, have students research heroes that inspire them in books, in the media, and in their own community—and have them tell the stories of the heroes they have selected.

SESSION 2: BE THE STORY: SELECT A PROJECT

- Challenge the students to make a list of three problems they are concerned about. Some prompts:
 - *What do you think could be better?*
 - *Are there people in your community who don't have enough food or who have no shelter?*
 - *Are there racial or religious prejudices that turn people in your community against each other?*
 - *Are there too many fights in your school, too many kids abusing drugs, getting pregnant, or dropping out?*
 - *Is the air where you live fit to breathe and the water fit to drink?*
 - *Are there global issues that concern you—environmental or human rights issues?*
- Have each student read their choices, while another student records them on the board or large sheet of paper.
- Have students discuss the issues that have been proposed, combining those that are similar. Give students who feel strongly about an issue the opportunity to speak up for it.
- If there is group consensus, then proceed to the next bullet point. If not, decide whether to take on more than one issue with available resources, or just choose one issue.
 - To choose an issue, have students do several rounds of voting, eliminating the lowest vote-getting idea in each round until only one idea is left.
 - If there are many issues to choose from, eliminate the least popular two or three issues with each vote.
- Once a problem is chosen, gather enough basic information about the problem so that you and your students get a clearer picture of it. For example: Who are the stakeholders? Has anyone tackled this, and with what result? Are there potential allies you could work with?

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS: SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

- Next, have students sharpen their focus by creating a service project that addresses the issue.
 - How big a project are you willing to take on? Steer away from projects that take more time than is available—but don't settle for something that won't be a stretch.
- Utilizing whatever is appropriate for the project from the [It's Up To Us](#) program, begin the service learning project.
- As the project develops, take advantage of the resources given in the guide, stories to support the process, and answers to questions you and the students may have.
- The [program guide](#) provides support with:
 - helping the group create a vision
 - working together as a team
 - inspiring courage and risk-taking
 - dealing with group issues and conflicts
 - encouraging and developing leadership
 - enlisting allies in the community

- fundraising
- getting the message out
- learning that failure is part of the process

CLOSURE

- Be sure to celebrate at the end of the project!
- As part of the closing and celebration, discuss with students:
 - What did you learn?
 - How did you feel about the process?
 - What was accomplished?
- Close with an acknowledgement of students' courage and caring.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- In what ways do you see the group has benefited from this service learning project?
- Do you see a more positive classroom climate? Are students demonstrating more caring and courage, more inspiration, more confidence, or more prosocial (kind, helpful) behavior?
- What would you change for the next service learning project?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research has found that [community service](#), especially when it is long-term, incorporates student autonomy and serves a humanitarian cause, can make students more prosocial (kind and helpful).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Helping others in need is a major part of life and something that students can learn to do early on. Indeed, designing and engaging in service-learning projects shows students that they can--and should--work to make the world a better place.

Service-learning can also be a powerful tool to help students understand how local and global issues connect, while giving them a chance to "act globally" through local community involvement.

SOURCE

Giraffe Heroes Project honors compassionate risk-takers who are largely unknown, people who have the courage to stick their necks out for the common good, in the U.S. and around the world. When we tell their stories over

social media, in our talks, and in our books, others are moved to stick their necks out too, helping solve significant public problems important to them. As long as there are Giraffe Heroes, there's hope.

Telling the series of heroes may be the oldest strategy in the world for motivating people into brave, compassionate action—and it works. See www.giraffe.org for books, blogs, curricula, speeches and trainings that can help your school succeed in inspiring students to courageous and compassionate action. Two full curricula can be downloaded for free from [The Giraffe Heroes Project](#).