



## **A Project-based Approach**

As technology helps classrooms connect more quickly and easily to the world, student-centered projects become exciting and offer educators a compelling alternative to the lecture-practice-assess approach to teaching.

Adria Steinberg wrote one of the first books for teachers about project-based learning, *Real Learning, Real Work*. In it, she identified six classic project design principles:

- **Authentic:** The project centers on a problem meaningful to students. They attempt to answer a question that an adult in the community might also ask and produce writing that has personal and social value beyond the school setting.
- **Academically Rigorous:** The project develops higher order thinking. Students use the same methods and thought processes that professionals use.
- **Applied Learning:** The project requires students to practice the organizational skills expected in collaborative, high-performing work organizations, using modern technology tools.
- **Active Exploration:** The project asks students to use a variety of methods, media, and sources in a real investigation with an unknown outcome.
- **Adult Relationships:** The project connects students with adult community experts.
- **Assessment:** The project results in students publishing their understanding for adults outside of school.

We have taken these six design principles and married them to a critical need for our time: media education.

## **A New Call for Media Education in the Mainstream Language Arts Classroom**

In April 2022, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a new position paper "Media Education in English Language Arts," calling for teachers to adopt media education pedagogies.

Six months later, the NCTE published a teacher guide that recommends language arts teachers adopt a three-pronged approach, to include:

### **Critical Media Literacy**

- "Ask students to critically analyze a wide range of media representing the evolving information landscape."
- "Plan opportunities for students and disseminate media about meaningful social issues."



### Community Conversations

- "Collaborate with your students to enact democratic relationships within the classroom."
- "Tear down the classroom walls to engage in student-led inquiry, advocacy, dialogue, and action with community members."

### Social Literary Analysis

- "Carefully curate a literature curriculum that encourages students to both see themselves and engage with the voices, experiences, and perspectives of wider civic communities."
- "Plan instruction that supports students to wrestle with the social issues surfaced by literary texts and practice creative and compassionate thinking about civic life."

Over the course of one quarter or trimester, the Effective Communicators project engages students meaningfully with the first two prongs.

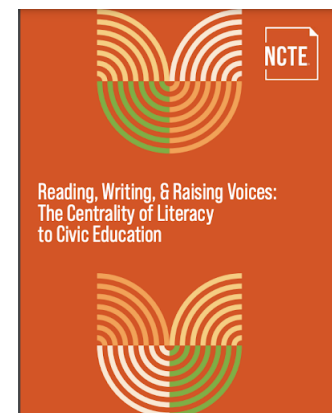
The inquiry and research phases of the project allow students to explore a wide range of media, while the interview and publishing components connect students to their community.

The project also lays a foundation for the third prong, since after leading students to publication, teachers have a clear idea of the genuine concerns of students. This makes it easier to select more relevant literature for the class.

Students also gain insight into how their community's social issues present themselves, which may increase understanding and compassion for literary characters and themes.

Because more than **90 percent of the English language arts standards** are practiced in the project, instructors can be confident that Effective Communicators is a rigorous, cohesive academic experience.

For more information, the NCTE's "**Reading, Writing, & Raising Voices: The Centrality of Literacy to Civic Education**" is available free online.





## **A Collaborative, Inquisitive Process**

As the course title *Effective Communicators* suggests, communication is central to the program we've constructed. Human interaction lies at the heart of nearly all the activities and exercises we've developed.

Working in reporting teams, students collaborate to produce and publish meaningful news articles and accompanying websites. Their journey begins with individual reflection: *What am I worried about? What do I notice that needs more attention?*

Next comes discussion and consensus: *This is what we wonder. This is what we will investigate.* Finding an issue that matters and grabs one's attention is relatively simple, but finding a single issue everyone in a team can agree to pursue for the remainder of a project can be tricky. Students may need to reconcile their differences and compromise in order to set a common goal.

Students will seek out a local expert on their chosen issue, a source they can invite to class (or Zoom) and interview in front of peers. They will need to learn the art of interviewing: *How can we get the most informative answers from our expert? How can we convince them to answer our questions in the first place?*

Students will also produce and share rough drafts with peers outside of their reporting team: *How can we offer feedback without discouraging our friends? How can we accept feedback to make our work better or reject feedback that we don't agree with?*

At every stage of the work cycle, students practice communication. They talk with each other; they talk with people in the community. They write for each other; they write to and for people in the community.