Students investigate a contemporary civil rights issue to understand the legacy of the civil rights movement and civil rights issues the movement did not address.

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle and high school

**TIME:** More than 90 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Identifying Community Issuesworksheet (download), Research Guide worksheet (download, optional), internet access

**PREPARE**

1. Make copies of the worksheet, one per student.
2. Use the Civil Rights Resources list at the end of this packet to find articles about current civil rights issues and links to additional support for implementing a service-learning project.
3. Review the sample Identifying Community Issues worksheet at the end of this packet. You may wish to distribute it to students new to the research process.

**DO**

(Note: For more support, see expanded procedure in downloadable lesson plan.)

1. As a class, define “community” and “civil rights.” Then, further define three types of civil rights: social, economic and legal/political.
2. Brainstorm a list of current civil rights issues that affect your community.
3. In pairs or individually, have your students pick one issue each to research further.
4. After completing their research, have students write short essays or create physical or multimedia posters to showcase their findings.
5. As a class, choose one issue that you find compelling and that you think you could work to change through a class project. This issue will form the foundation for lessons 2 and 3 of this unit.

**DISCUSS**

Have students present their projects to their classmates and discuss their findings. Prompts include:

* Which of these issues has the widest impact on our community?
* Which of these issues is new? Which have been around for a long time?
* Which of these issues seems most difficult/easiest to address and why?
* Who has attempted to solve these issues in the past? How have they succeeded? How have they failed?
* Which of these issues did the civil rights movement, which peaked in the 1950s and 1960s, address or attempt to address?
* How could you apply lessons learned about the civil rights movement to addressing these issues today?

**OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Real World Connection: Meet with a representative from a local nonprofit that addresses a community issue or issues (such as the local United Way, a food bank or a religious charitable organization) to find out more about how these groups identify community problems and work to implement solutions. Have your students prepare questions in advance of the meeting. Afterward, have students write an article about the organization and its methods.

Extended Procedure

* 1. Ask the students to think about the word “community.” What is their community? Discuss their ideas. *Possible answers: our neighborhood, our city/town, our school, groups to which students belong (clubs, religious organizations), etc.* The most basic definition of community is a group of people who share a common culture. Today, it’s possible to develop communities online with people who do not live in the same place, but for the purpose of today’s lesson we will focus on a definition of community that also includes living in the same area, such that the communities’ achievements and shortcomings become part of the shared culture.
  2. Ask students to share what they now know about the term “civil rights.” What does it mean, both in the context of the movement that peaked in the 1950s and 1960s and in a more general sense? Younger students in particular may wish to look at the civil rights media map or timeline for ideas and historical examples. *In short, civil rights allow individuals to be full and equal members of society. In the United States, civil rights are social, economic, legal and political liberties, many of which are guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The ability to exercise these rights gives people access to social goods and services, such as the pursuit of employment and access to the legal process, and a voice in our democracy.*
  3. Explain that civil rights can be sorted into three categories: social, economic and legal/political. Work with students to define each of these categories.
     + **Social:** Having to do with interactions with other people, community spaces and activities, including issues affecting how people socialize and with whom, etc.
     + **Economic:** Having to do with money, including issues affecting taxes, salaries, etc.
     + **Legal/political:** Having to do with the legal system (courts), laws and government, including issues affecting voting rights, lawsuits, etc.
  4. Look at the Newseum Pinterest board “[Civil Rights Issues Today](https://www.pinterest.com/newseumed/civil-rights-issues-today/)” (<https://www.pinterest.com/newseumed/civil-rights-issues-today/>) and label each issue as one or more of the above categories.
  5. Using the stories curated in NewseumED’s Pinterest board as a starting point, create a list of additional current social issues/problems that could be considered civil rights issues and label each with one or more categories. Discuss which of these issues affect your community and cite examples.
  6. Give students time to use local news sources (newspapers, television, radio, community blogs, etc.) to find stories about local social issues for your list. Be sure to keep a record of sources used, as you will refer to them again in Lesson 3. You may hand out the Research Guide worksheet to support students new to the research process.
  7. In pairs or individually, have your students pick one issue each to research further. Use the included Identifying Community Issues worksheet as a framework for their research. After completing their research, have students write short essays or create physical or multimedia posters to showcase their findings.

Civil Rights Resources

For more information on identifying appropriate community issues for service projects, we suggest:

* National Youth Leadership Council: <http://nylc.org/service-learning>
* Youth Service America: <http://www.ysa.org/resources>
* National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: <https://gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse>
* Campus Compact: <http://www.compact.org/resources-for-faculty/>

Suggested resources for researching current civil rights issues:

* ABC News topic page: <http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/issues/civil-rights.htm>
* Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division: <http://www.justice.gov/otj/civil-rights>
* Equal Rights Center: [www.equalrightscenter.org](http://www.equalrightscenter.org)
* The Leadership Conference: <http://www.civilrights.org/issues/>
* Annenberg Classroom: [http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/speakouts.aspx?name=what-are-the-civil- rights-issues-of-today&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1](http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/speakouts.aspx?name=what-are-the-civil-rights-issues-of-today&amp;AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1)

**Example Worksheet: Identifying Community Issues**

**Your civil rights issue:** Equal access to digital technology

**Is this a social, economic or legal/political issue?**

Social, because it affects how you interact with other people; also economic because it affects your education, and you need a good education to get a good job.

**Why did you choose this issue?**

I have several friends who don’t have computers or the Internet at home, and they have told me about how hard it can be to do their school assignments. They also don’t get to play games online or do the other fun things that you can use computers and the Internet for.

**The history of your issue:**

**When did this issue arise and why/how?**

In the 1980s and 1990s, more and more people were getting home computers and home connections to the Internet as these technologies became more affordable. But there were still a lot of people who could not afford these tools, and a “digital divide” developed between people and places who had access to computers and the Internet and those who did not.

**Whom has this issue affected in the past and how?**

This issue has affected people all over the world of all ages and backgrounds. In the United States, many poor people cannot afford to own computers or pay for Internet access at their homes. In other countries, people may not even have access to public computers. Without access to computers, students have a hard time completing their schoolwork and staying informed about the world. Adults may not be able to do their jobs or communicate about important things.

**What efforts have others made to address this issue? Have they been effective? Why/why not?**

One way people have attempted to solve the problem of unequal access to technology in other countries is through the “One Laptop Per Child” program. This is an international organization that delivers basic laptops with Internet access to students in poor communities around the world. Students can use these laptops to learn and to communicate with each other. The program has reached thousands of kids, but this type of program requires a lot of money, plus access to technology manufacturing companies and international connections.

In the United States, some cities are trying to end the digital divide by providing free access to the Internet through public Wi-Fi networks. While this doesn’t solve the problem of access to devices to use the Internet, it would make it much easier for students and adults who had laptops, tablets or even smartphones to complete their work and studies, even if their families could not afford Internet service at home. There are not a lot of these programs, however, and in rural areas it is very difficult and expensive to set up Internet access that can serve people who live in very spread-out communities.

**Your issue today**

**Whom does this issue affect in your community and how?**

This issue affects people of all races and ages. Most of the people it affects are poor and can’t afford to buy a computer or pay for Internet access. Without access to computers, students might not be able to get their homework done or have to find public computers to do their work. Adults need computers to to find out about the news and sometimes to take care of responsibilities related to their jobs.

**How would addressing this issue improve your community?**

If more people had access to computers and the Internet, then students who used to have a hard time finishing homework would be able to complete their assignments more easily and get better grades. Adults could use the computers to apply for jobs, use email and stay informed about what’s going on in our town and around the world.

**Are others attempting to address this issue? If not, why not? If so, who is? What methods are they using? Have they been effective?**

The public library has a program to give teens access to the library’s computers in the afternoons to work on homework, but a lot of the students who don’t have computers also don’t have a way to get to a library after school. There aren’t enough computers for all of the kids, so they have to set time limits. There also is a community center downtown that has a computer lab for students and adults, but their computers are old, and it is only open for a few hours on weekdays.