

## **Ring in the New Year with Community-Based Resolutions: Taking Action through Service Learning**

*Key Lesson Strategy:*  
Service Learning

*Lesson Overview:*

Students will work together to critically question the notion of creating personal New Year's resolutions and, instead, create community-based resolutions aimed towards positively impacting or improving the lives of others in their community or around the world. Using service learning, students will take action on these community-based resolutions, working as active citizens in their local and global community.

*Grade Level:*  
Lower or Upper Elementary

*Objectives:*

- Students will explore the meaning and a brief history of New Year's resolutions.
- Students will critically question personally centered New Year's resolutions.
- Students will develop community-based resolutions aimed at positively impacting or improving the lives of others in their community or around the world.
- Students will work as active citizens to take action on one or more of these community-based resolutions through planning and implementing a service-learning project.
- Students will reflect upon, celebrate, and publicize their civic engagement through their service-learning efforts, noting how they have disrupted traditionally held notions about New Year's resolutions being personally driven and often aimed at improving physical appearance.

*Materials:*

- World Map or Google Earth
- 1 copy of *Squirrel's New Year's Resolution* by Pat Miller
- Copies of from "Resolution to Action" Student Planning Handout

*Lesson Plan:*

1. Begin by asking students, "What are New Year's resolutions?" Write the question and record student ideas on the board. Push students to try to come up with a definition for this concept and also to list some examples of New Year's resolutions that they or family members have made in previous years.
2. Tell students that creating New Year's resolutions began over 4,000 years ago in Babylon, which was located about an hour south of the current city of Baghdad in Iraq. Use a map or Google Earth to identify this location. Inform students that the ancient Babylonians recorded some of the first celebrations of a new year, which were largely religious in nature. (<http://www.history.com/topics/new-years>)

3. Explain that New Year's resolutions often involve people creating personal goals to improve their life or make changes in their daily habits. While creating these types of resolutions is important and valid, ask students to begin thinking about how they could make New Year's resolutions that could positively impact or improve the lives of others in their community or around the world. Support them critically questioning the notion of personal New Year's resolutions, by asking questions such as "Why are many of these resolutions only about one person?" "What kinds of messages do we receive through the media about New Year's resolutions?" "How can we use our New Year's resolutions in a different way?"
4. Introduce the text *Squirrel's New Year's Resolution* by Pat Miller. This is a book about a squirrel who wants to learn about New Year's resolutions, so he asks a local librarian, who tells him that "a resolution is a promise you make to yourself to be better or to help others." As squirrel walks through the woods trying to think of a personal resolution, he ends up helping various friends in different ways. Later, when he feels that he cannot come up with a resolution, these friends point out the ways that he has helped them and that actions are more powerful than words. (Please note that if you are teaching in an upper elementary classroom, you may find this book to be too juvenile for your students and perhaps want to locate another resource to illustrate your point.)
5. Read this text aloud, making sure to stop to check for comprehension, to ask questions, and to point out key elements of the storyline. Upon finishing the read aloud, ask students, "What can we learn about New Year's resolutions from this book?" "What might we want to add to or change about our earlier ideas about New Year's resolutions on the board?"
6. Encourage students to begin thinking more deeply about how they can create New Year's resolutions that can positively impact or improve the lives of others. Have students first work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm ideas on paper for these types of resolutions. Remind students that these community-based resolutions can involve their classroom, school, local area, or even places and people around the world. Encourage students to dream big!
7. Next, bring the class back together and have students share their ideas. Record their ideas on chart paper or the board. What are some common themes or topics of these community-based resolutions? How do these ideas differ from personally based resolutions and instead work to improve one's community and/or the lives of others?
8. Inform students that they are going to have the opportunity to work together to take action on one or a few of these topics through a service-learning project. Support students thinking critically about the time and resources needed to effectively act on the ideas they have shared. Facilitate the class making a decision about which of these ideas they are most interested in pursuing and the feasibility of these ideas. If possible, perhaps offer students the opportunity to take action in teams on more than one of these ideas.

9. Some ideas for service-learning projects may include themes such as:
- Sustainability
    - Water conservation
    - Environmental awareness
    - Energy or resource conservation
  - Hunger
    - Partnering with a local organization that fights hunger
    - Working to decrease food waste at your school
    - Raising awareness about the realities of hunger in your community
  - Literacy
    - Writing books to share with a local or global organization
    - Starting a reading partnership with a local group or another classroom
    - Raising awareness about decreased funding at your local library
  - Healthy Habits
    - Host a family fitness event at your school that promotes healthy habits
    - Combat unhealthy lunches at your school
    - Raise awareness about the impacts of decreased physical activity
  - Intercultural understanding
    - Create digital media informing others about the diverse cultures and languages represented at your school or in your community
    - Host a community event aimed at promoting tolerance and understanding
    - Use the arts to explore and educate others about diverse cultural traditions
  - Animal welfare
    - Partner with a local animal shelter to support their efforts
    - Raise awareness about puppy mills in your area or state
    - Investigate laws about animal treatment in your state
  - Responding to a local or global disaster
    - Partner with the Red Cross, or another organization to provide relief to an afflicted community
    - Raise funds and/or gather products to send to an afflicted community
    - Educate others about emergency preparedness protocols in your area

(\*Please see service-learning resources at the end of this lesson plan to support your planning and implementation of your project.)

10. As you work with students to plan these service-learning endeavors, aim to stay focused on the key goals of service learning, which include, but are not limited to the following.

Service learning involves:

- Integration of service with classroom instruction
- Clear academic aims and connections to academic standards
- Working with community partners over an extended period of time
- Student reflection upon their experiences and learning outcomes

Additionally, help identify guest speakers, community and print-based resources, and potential partnerships that will support student learning and civic engagement on the topic they have chosen.

11. As students plan and implement their community-based resolutions continue to remind them that they are working as active citizens in their local and global community. They, too, have a voice and can take action to affect change! Encourage them to get others in their school, at home, or in the community involved in their efforts. Support students recognizing that the New Year's holiday, and especially New Year's resolutions, can have deeper meaning and more tangible community-based outcomes than previously considered. Celebrate and publicize student efforts, noting how they have disrupted traditionally held notions or media influence about New Year's resolutions being personally centered and often involving elements of personal appearance.

### **Service Learning Resources:**

Berger-Kaye, C. (2009). *The complete guide to service learning: Proven, practical ways to engage students in civic responsibility, academic curriculum, and social action*. Free Spirit Publishing: Minneapolis, MN.

Kids Consortium: <http://www.kidsconsortium.org/>

Learn & Serve America: <http://www.learnandserve.gov/>

Learning to Give: <http://learningtogive.org/>

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

National Youth Leadership Council: <http://www.nylc.org/>

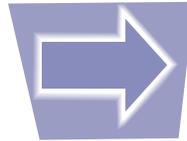
Service-Learning Ideas & Curricular Examples (SLICE): <http://www.servicelearning.org/slice>

## Pullout Part 2: *From Resolution to Action*



My New Year's Resolution

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Our New Year's Resolution for the community/world

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**Work together with a partner or small group to share ideas for New Year's resolutions for the community/world. Use the boxes below to brainstorm and record ideas for a class service learning project.**

What are our ideas?	Where can we learn more?	Who can we work with to take action?	Why is this project important?

**Together we can make a difference!**