



# Discovering Community

*Activities for Afterschool Programs*

National Institute on Out-of-School Time  
*in association with*  
The After-School Corporation (TASC)

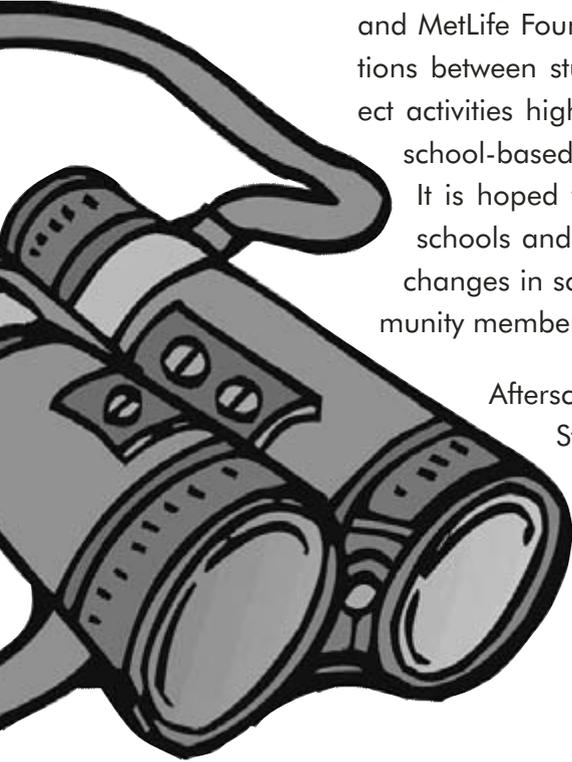
**Funded by MetLife Foundation**

## Introduction

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Discovering Community, a national initiative created by The After-School Corporation and MetLife Foundation was designed to foster positive attitudes and stronger affiliations between students, teachers, and the surrounding school community. The project activities highlighted in this publication were conducted within the framework of school-based afterschool programs operated by community-based organizations. It is hoped that by fostering greater collaboration and mutual respect between schools and communities, the activities will help create a foundation for positive changes in school culture and relationships between students, teachers, and community members.

Afterschool programs in New York, Baltimore, Boston, Pinellas County (FL), St. Louis, East St. Louis (IL), Charlotte, and Rome (NY) participated in the activities outlined in this publication. Activities were implemented during the spring and fall 2005 and spring 2006 school semesters. The youth involved were all middle school students.



## Priorities for Successful Programming

Youth participating in the “Discovering Community” activities experienced many changes in the ways they felt about the surrounding community, interacted with the community, understood the structure and governance of the community, and gained a sense of their roles and responsibilities within the community. Many school principals felt that in time whole school culture could be impacted. Based on our experience visiting with afterschool program leaders and youth participants we organized the following list of program elements that seemed to greatly contribute to the successful implementation of the activities.



## Discovering Community

- > Recruit youth who are already active/enthusiastic participants in the afterschool program.
- > Engage the Principal’s interest in the activities.
- > Bring in a community volunteer to help plan activities, i.e., artist, community organizer, historian, etc.
- > Recruit day school teachers to participate.
- > Promote school-wide awareness of activities, i.e., newsletters, school announcements, school bulletins, fliers, etc.
- > Hold culminating events/community celebrations.
- > Create visible products that can be shared.

## Warm Up Activity

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*Before beginning any of the activities outlined in this publication it may be helpful to begin your group activity with a discussion about the word “community”. This activity may take about 1.5 hours.*

**Part One:** Divide youth into groups and instruct them to write the word “community” in the middle of their posterboard. Ask them to brainstorm as a group a definition of “community”. Youth also write other words on the poster that come to mind when they hear the word “community”. Pass out magazines and scissors and ask the youth to include on the poster some pictures from the magazines that reflect their ideas of “community”. They could alternatively draw pictures.

**Part Two:** Ask each group to describe their poster. Discuss some of the different opinions about community, choice of picture, etc.

**Discussion Starters:** How do people in a community work for a common goal? How can it be helpful to know a community’s history?

**Sharing:** Place the posters in a high traffic area in the school building or program space.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

*1.5 hours*

### **Materials Needed**

*Posterboard, markers, magazines, scissors, glue sticks*

### **Goal**

*To explore definitions of community, raise awareness of community, and team building.*

## Activity 1: Community Rap

**Part One:** Spend time in small groups brainstorming about the community issues that are of greatest concern to the youth. Decide on an issue as a larger group and then return to small groups to begin creating rap lyrics. Listen to some popular rap songs to stimulate creativity. Distribute copies of the lyrics for practice and map out related stage movement and vocal parts.

**Part Two:** Arrange to perform the rap at a school event. Seek out other performance opportunities such as morning announcements or sports games.

**Discussion Starters:** Why is the issue you chose important to you? What message do you hope to convey through the rap song? What are possible solutions to the issue?

**Sharing:** Students may enjoy creating CD copies of the rap song to share with elementary school classrooms in the neighborhood. If there is a school or district web site there may be an opportunity to showcase the students performing the rap.



## Discovering Community

### Time

3 sessions;  
2 hours each

### Materials Needed

Pencils, notepads, tape recorder (optional), large notepad for lyrics.

### Goal

Familiarize youth with issues that are of current concern in the community and tap into a comfortable method of public presentation.

## Activity 2: Taking Action

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**Part One:** As a large group discuss and decide on a community issue that the youth would like to address through advocacy and action. Once the larger group has agreed on an issue, break-down into smaller groups of up to 6 youth and one adult facilitator. Each small group will create an action plan and develop a list of concrete action steps to do one of the following:

- Hold a community meeting
- Create an in-school survey
- Stage a rally
- Write a letter to the editor
- Participate in a march
- Start an in-school interest group

**Part Two:** Small groups share plans and distribute copies of action plans to all the youth. Work with local community activists to actualize plans.

**Discussion Starters:** How might your action steps help to resolve the community issue? What are the important things that need to happen in order for you to complete your action steps?

**Sharing:** Contact local community newspapers to cover the youth advocacy/action activities. Take pictures for a school display board and post news clippings, letters, and surveys.



## Discovering Community

### Time

2 sessions;  
2 hours each  
(additional time  
outside of school)

### Materials Needed

Pencils and notepads.

### Goal

Familiarize youth with the issues that are of current concern in the community and facilitate youth taking action in a variety of ways to address the issues.

## Activity 3: Recycle Rage

**Part One:** Have youth collect a variety and large quantity of recycled materials (such as cardboard, plastic trays, juice and soda bottles, paper towel tubes) that can be used to create game booths for an indoor cardboard carnival. Youth meet to discuss ideas for game booths, prizes, refreshments, and attendees. Youth work in small groups on each one of these tasks. Local elementary-age school or recreation groups are invited to attend. Youth build the carnival games, work as game-booth facilitators, and serve the carnival snacks.

**Part Two:** Youth distribute information packets about recycling at the carnival. Have youth design a recycle survey that challenges participants to examine their own recycle habits.

**Discussion Starters:** What are the benefits of recycling? What are ways to encourage more people to recycle? How do we encourage manufacturers to use more recyclable material in packaging products?

**Sharing:** Invite a local reporter to cover the event.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

*Multiple sessions*

### **Materials Needed**

*Scissors, heavy duty tape, game board pieces, variety of recycled materials, markers, paints, pencils, and rulers.*

### **Goal**

*Raise awareness about the importance of recycling and developing creativity in use recycled products.*

## Activity 4: 2-4-6-8 Who Do We Appreciate

**Part One:** Students work together to plan an appreciation luncheon for their teachers. In small groups youth plan a menu, arrange for donated food items, create invitations, organize decorations, and design appreciation posters and banner to hang in school. Luncheon can be held on professional development day or during lunch time shifts in school cafeteria.

**Part Two:** Youth serve the lunch and prepare a brief address to introduce the event. Opportunity for youth to create and share an appreciation poem or essay.

**Discussion Starters:** What are all the ways that teachers serve a school community? Would any of you be interested in a teaching career and why? What are the benefits to working as a teacher?

**Sharing:** Take pictures of the events and post in a very visible place in the school building. Several of the youth can write an article for the school newspaper or local community paper.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

3 sessions;  
1.5 hours each  
(2 hours for event)

### **Materials Needed**

*Pens, paper, paper goods, donated food items, decorations.*

### **Goal**

*Build positive relationships between students and teachers; Youth work collectively to increase understanding between youth and adults and to express appreciation of the adults.*

**MetLife Foundation**

## Activity 5: Homework Helpers

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**Part One:** Middle school youth create a homework club that will provide homework assistance to the local elementary school children. This is a comprehensive activity which requires adult facilitators to negotiate an agreement with the elementary school and to create and deliver sufficient training for the youth to provide valuable assistance. We suggest about a two-week training period. Youth can take the lead on creating: Homework Guidebook for Tutors, Homework Assistance Rules for Participants, Daily Self-Evaluation Form, Parent Permission Form for Participants, Announcement Flyers.

**Part Two:** Middle school tutors offer homework assistance two days a week from 3:00 -4:30 PM. They can lead enrichment games during the homework time period for those elementary-age youth who have completed homework or don't have any assigned. The tutors meet from 4:30 – 5:00 after each homework assistance session to debrief with adult facilitator.

**Discussion Starters:** How can working as a tutor be a benefit to you? In what ways do you think you can help elementary-age students with their homework? What does it mean to be a mentor?

**Sharing:** News about the homework club should be shared in the middle and elementary school newspapers, principal letters, and parent notices. Contact a local community paper to highlight the activity.



## Discovering Community

### Time

Semester

### Materials Needed

*Pencils, notepads, journals, calculators, dictionaries, rulers, and paper.*

### Goal

*To increase understanding between middle school and elementary school children; To encourage middle school youth to serve as role models for younger children.*

## Activity 6: Booktalks

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**Part One:** Working in teams of two, middle school students review the summer elementary school reading list and choose a book to profile. Students read the book and take notes on note cards. Using these notes each team of two prepares an oral presentation on the book and designs a poster that helps to tell the story.

**Part Two:** The students give booktalks in several classrooms at the local elementary school. The emphasis is on inspiring the elementary-age youth to read the books, visit the library, etc.

**Discussion Starters:** What makes a good book? How do you inspire someone else to read a book that you enjoyed? How can choosing to read a book sometimes be a better choice than watching TV or going to a movie?

**Sharing:** The posters are displayed in the elementary school classrooms.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

3 sessions;  
2 hours each  
(2 hours for event)

### **Materials Needed**

*Pencils, note cards, copies of reading books, elementary school reading list, markers, poster board, web pictures (computer and printer), tape, and glue.*

### **Goal**

*Build relationships between younger and older students; Building community while practicing English Language Arts skills.*

**MetLife Foundation**

## Activity 7: Careers on Camera

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**Part One:** Youth work in small groups in all areas of production including writing, filming, and editing. Youth work is facilitated and supervised by expert technical assistants. Youth prepare questions for and conduct community member interviews. Invite additional industry professionals as guest presenters to share information about video production with the students.

**Part Two:** Once production is complete make a formal announcement that the video is available for viewing. Distribute copies to each youth. Youth should prepare a short oral presentation summarizing the production process and overview of the video content which can be delivered in school classrooms.

**Discussion Starters:** What careers interest you? What goes into making a decision about pursuing a particular career? How will you know what career is best for you?

**Sharing:** Hold a culminating event that features the showing of the community careers video. Invite the school community and surrounding neighbors and business leaders. It may be helpful to attach this event to another planned school function that draws strong attendance from the school community. Include the video as a resource in the guidance office “career” collection.



## Discovering Community

### Time

Semester

### Materials Needed

Audio and video equipment, computer access, writing materials, technical assistance.

### Goal

Document through writing, photography, audio and video the vocations and career choices of community members; Help youth to understand the tapestry of career and life experiences that make up a community.

**MetLife Foundation**

## Activity 8: Journaling Journeys

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**Part One:** Arrange for students to take several field trips to local protected ecosystems, such as wetland, salt marsh, pond, estuary, state park, etc. Youth document their impressions in their journals through writing and pictures as they participate in the field trips. Invite guest speakers from a local environmental center to present and facilitate a discussion during one of the afternoon meetings. Youth can share reflections from their journals in small groups during afternoon meeting time.

**Part Two:** During the last meeting have students break into small groups and take on one of the following tasks: (1) activity overview article for school paper or principal newsletter; (2) letter to the editor for local paper expressing concerns related to environmental protection; (3) ecosystem poster for science classroom.

**Discussion Starters:** In what ways has urban development endangered natural environments? How do we balance preserving the environment and building new houses and businesses? What role can an individual play in helping to protect the environment?

**Sharing:** Arrange for students to present their experiences to younger elementary students as part of a classroom science activity.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

5 sessions;  
2 hours each

### **Materials Needed**

Pencils, pens, and journals.

### **Goal**

*Increase youth awareness of the relationship between the environment and preservation of the community; Increase understanding of each person's role in protecting the community environment.*

## Activity 9: Our School, Our Home

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**Part One:** Students spend the first session discussing the importance of youth voice in the school community and issues related to the physical environment of the school that are of concern to them. These discussions can occur in small groups and then be presented back to the larger group. During the next meeting students take a detailed walking tour of the school building and grounds noting their observations in their notepads. Students create a survey that asks their classmates to report on school environment issues of concern.

**Part Two:** Based on their own observations and classmate survey results the youth choose a school environment issue to address. The youth meet with the school principal to discuss possible projects that will yield appropriate and sustainable solutions.

**Discussion Starters:** How many hours a year do you spend in the school building? What are ways you would like to see the school building change? How do you help to create among other school community members a respect for the school environment and property?

**Sharing:** Students should write several activity updates for the school newspaper or principal's newsletter. Some students could prepare an oral presentation to share with members of the PTA/PTO and school board.



### **Time**

*Semester*

### **Materials Needed**

*Pencils, pens, paper, access to copy machine, and notepads.*

### **Goal**

*To address school environment issues through collaborative efforts between the afterschool program youth and the rest of the school community.*

## Activity 10: We Are What We Eat

**Part One:** Work with a nutrition/science specialist to present several curricular units on food production systems and general nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Youth create a survey to distribute to school peers about daily food consumption. A summary of the survey findings, which communicates information about the eating habits of the school youth, can be captured in several posters and a news article. Youth should conduct web research on the food pyramid and healthy eating choices. Arrange for field trips to a local food bank and supermarket. Students should take notes as they visit the supermarket (see discussion questions below).

**Part Two:** Youth host a healthy eating forum for their families for which they prepare fresh and nutritious snacks.

**Discussion Starters:** How do you describe your eating habits? In what ways could you change your eating habits to be healthier? How do local food stores present food products? Why do some food products go on sale? How much do you think shoppers pay attention to nutrition labels on food products? What influences shoppers to buy certain products? Does it make a difference for the community when there is a large supermarket versus small grocery stores?

**Sharing:** At culminating healthy eating forum youth present an overview of their project and knowledge gained. Survey posters can later be displayed in science classrooms.



## Discovering Community

### Time

5 sessions;  
1.5 hours each

### Materials Needed

Pencils, notepads, paper, calculators, access to school kitchen/cafeteria for food prep, and access to computers and copier.

### Goal

Help youth understand the importance of healthy eating choices and to understand community contributions to food production and distribution.

**MetLife Foundation**

## Activity 11: One World

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**Part One:** Youth develop a survey about immigration experiences and interview community residents. The youth summarize the information collected into a presentation including topics such as cultural stereotyping and the challenges new immigrants face. Facilitators should arrange for a guest speaker such as a legislator knowledgeable about immigration law, policy, and current political trends.

**Part Two:** In small groups youth spend one session researching background on a particular policy development and then hold a mock debate. Invite teachers and school administrators to the debate.

**Discussion Starters:** What is your cultural history? What are some of the challenges that immigrants face in their new countries? In what ways can local communities reach out to new immigrant people?

**Sharing:** Arrange with classroom teachers for the students to present their findings during related social studies classroom activities.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

*5 sessions;  
2 hours each*

### **Materials Needed**

*Pencils, notepads, tape recorder, access to computers.*

### **Goal**

*Expose youth to issues related to immigration and cultural difference.*

## Activity 12: Calling All Volunteers

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**Part One:** The afterschool program youth promote volunteerism by setting a school participation goal of 1000 collective hours of volunteer service for the semester. Announce the challenge at a school assembly. Youth create volunteer logs which are distributed to all participants and used to tabulate volunteer hours. With the guidance of adult facilitators, youth organize volunteer projects in the school and local community that can be performed by classmates. Youth perform communication and monitoring activities such as publicizing volunteer opportunities and tracking participation.

**Part Two:** Youth encourage participation in the volunteer challenge by designing posters displayed around the school and communicating campaign updates through morning announcements and school newsletters.

**Discussion Starters:** What role do volunteers play in the local community? What are examples of community organizations that seek out volunteers?

**Sharing:** Plan a culminating celebration to recognize the completion of valuable volunteer work. Invite community and local government representatives to award certificates of achievement.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

*Semester*

### **Materials Needed**

*Pencils, notepads, paper, access to copier, and access to computers.*

### **Goal**

*Engage the afterschool youth and broader school community in volunteer activities.*

## Activity 13: Mural of Leaders

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**Part One:** Students are introduced to the fundamental skills of ceramic art and provided extensive practice in using art tools, materials, and techniques. Through books, journals, and Internet resources students investigate the lives of selected local and world leaders. Youth create ceramic images of these leaders on tiles that are joined together in a mural.

**Part Two:** Youth can prepare short essays describing the contributions of the selected leaders and share this information through group presentations.

**Discussion Starters:** What makes a successful leader? Who do you think about as leaders in your community today? What world leader would you be most interested in meeting and why?

**Sharing:** Photograph the mural development process and set up a display in a prominent area of the school building. Hold an unveiling ceremony including school community, neighborhood, and local government officials.



## Discovering Community

### Time

*Semester*

### Materials Needed

*Ceramic supplies and equipment and skilled assistance.*

### Goal

*To introduce the art of ceramic to youth and to create permanent images in the community of notable local and world leaders.*

## Activity 14: Everybody's Business

**Part One:** Students spend several sessions preparing to conduct interviews with local business owners. Prep activities include a neighborhood walk and mapping exercise, interview question development, mock interviews, and essay writing practice. Students complete business profiles based on the interviews and prepare a final text to include in a resource guide publication. Add photos of students and business leaders.

**Part Two:** Invite the interviewed business leaders to be a part of a celebration dinner banquet. Youth give brief presentations on the project and distribute the resource guide.

**Discussion Starters:** What are the benefits of your local community? What would it be like to be a business/store owner in your local community? Are there careers in your local community that are of interest to you? What skills will you need to enter the workforce?

**Sharing:** Distribute the business resource guide to faculty, families, and community members. Ask local businesses to display copies for easy pick-up.



## Discovering Community

### Time

Semester

### Materials Needed

*Pencils, notepads, tape recorder (optional), training on Microsoft Publisher, and access to computers.*

### Goal

*Familiarize youth with businesses in the local community, opportunities for career choices, and available resources; Create a community resource guide to build community relationships.*

## Activity 15: Photo Hunt

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**Part One:** Equipped with cameras youth participate in a guided photo hunt around the school community. Present youth with a list of subjects/community concepts/community components (include their suggestions, also) that can be captured through photography. Examples are: people cooperating; people at work; leadership; membership; education; community change; history; worship; home; and pride. Students capture these images in pictures.

**Part Two:** Students use the pictures to create posters that represent definitions of community.

**Discussion Starters:** How do you define community? What makes your community unique? In what ways can you contribute to the positive growth of your community?

**Sharing:** Posters can be displayed in the school and in other local community organizations such as libraries and health facilities.



## Discovering Community

### **Time**

*3 sessions;  
2 hours each*

### **Materials Needed**

*Poster board, digital cameras, and access to computers.*

### **Goal**

*To help youth see the school community in a new way; To recognize community assets and qualities through art.*

# Special Thanks

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*Special thanks to the following afterschool programs participating in the “Discovering Community” initiative:*

Baltimore Algebra Project/Stadium Middle School: Baltimore, MD

Boys & Girls Club of Mohawk Valley/Staley Middle School: Rome, NY

Fellowship of Light/Barclay Middle School: Baltimore, MD

Forest Hills Community House/JHS 190: Queens, NY

Hyde Square Task Force/Curley Middle School: Boston, MA

Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center Boys & Girls Club/Lincoln Middle School: East St. Louis, IL

Parks and People/Harlem Park Middle School: Baltimore, MD

POST/JT Williams Middle School: Charlotte, NC

Queens Child Guidance Center/Middle School 74: Queens, NY

R’Club/John Hopkins Middle School: St. Petersburg, FL

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