

Community Mapping Activity for Project Get Outdoors

Topic: Youth-led community mapping activity for Project Get Outdoors

Objective: To help youth collaborate together to gain wider and more extensive knowledge of the resources available to them in their own communities, while simultaneously developing the important leadership and social skills that are essential to becoming an active citizen.

The activity would preferably be done on a backdrop of outdoor recreation and learning. So it is hoped that places the youth choose to map, if not outdoor areas, will have some kind of significance to the outdoors.

Here are a few examples of outdoor areas that could be mapped:

- Parks
- Sport fields
- Any area that is not developed in some way
- Environmental organizations, clubs and businesses
- Recycling areas
- Hiking, and bike trails
- Places to rent outdoor recreation equipment

Preparation:

If working without a whiteboard or chalkboard cut a large (at least something close to 3x5ft). Also go on the website for the community and search around for outdoor resources to remind the youth of if they ask for help or appear to be really stuck. Ideally this activity would be carried out on one of the first days the new school year so it could be used for reference later on in the season. Also, the closer to win

Materials:

Pre-Walk around

- Post-it Notes (Standard Size)
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Whiteboard markers/ chalk (if using whiteboard or chalk board)
- Large sheet of paper if white board/chalk board is not available

Walk Around

- Camera (Disposable/Digital)
- Appropriate clothing for the season

Instructions

1. Begin by giving the youth a definition of community mapping. Then ask the youth why *they* think knowing about their community is important and helpful. Afterwards you can explain why you think it is important as well, but make sure to let the kids do most of the thinking.
2. Give the youth the materials (post-its, markers, paper (if not working on whiteboard/chalkboard)), and explain that their first job is to work as a team to map out their community as they know it. You can narrow down what will be included on the map by suggesting they map out places that involve outdoor recreation, or even places that may have information on outdoor activities. However, make sure not to narrow the scope too much or disregard ideas that may seem irrelevant to the project. Just keep in mind that the more places that are mapped, the more you will be able to infer about how the youth understand their community.
3. The youth will use the materials to draw a large outline of their community. Then they will be free to draw out their community. They can do this with one color, or they could get more creative and make a colorful map using crayons, colored pencils and markers. Whatever they feel works best. Then they can name each place they come up with, write it on a post-it and place it on the map.
4. Once the map is completed it is time to go out into the community and visit the places they map. Doing this will give them a chance to visualize their map 3-dimensionally, instead of on a flat piece of paper. It will also give them a chance to find other outdoor places that they may have forgotten to include or did not know about in the first place.
5. The way this step is approached will depend on how large the group of youth is and how large the community is. It may work best for some groups to do the exploring on foot in one large group. However if there is an extra volunteer available the group may be able to split into two groups and each one could go to the opposite end of the community and work their way towards each other.
6. Use this time to let the youth walk freely around their community. This portion of the activity should be as unstructured as possible. Ask them to take a picture of each place they find that they may want to include in the map. If there is only one camera, let each student have a turn taking a picture.
7. Once everyone has come back from being outdoors ask them to add anything to the map that they may have discovered during the second part of the activity.
8. Have everyone sit in a circle and ask them a few reflection questions about their experience.

For example:

- What was the difference between mapping out your community on a sheet of paper, and going out to do it on foot?

 - Which did you enjoy more?

 - Why do you think that is?

- Did mapping your community make you realize that you know more about your community than you thought, or less?

- Now that you have created your map, do you feel that your community provides you with enough, and appropriate places to learn and spend time in the outdoors?

- Why do you think it was important that *you* created this map rather than a group of adults? What did *you* contribute that they may not be able to?

- Taking what you have learned from this activity, if there was one thing, you specifically, could change about your community, what would it be?

9. Once the pictures are developed, add them to the map that the youth have created. You can also give them the opportunity to refine, or improve their map with the new information they gathered during the second part of the activity.

10. After the pictures have been put onto the map, ask the youth to write a bio for each place to go under the picture. The bio can include a short description can be anything from what the space is used for to how the space makes them feel. Each student can write a bio about a specific place in the way they want to, or the group can decide on a central way write the bios and do them together.

Once the map is created it is up to the group to decide what they want to do with it, or if they want to document it in some other way. Their finished product will be a direct result of a collaborative effort, designed by them, to learn about their surroundings.

