

Lesson Title:

Documenting Local Issues and Activism with Speedy Mini-Documentaries

Grade Levels:

Middle School (6-8)

The lesson can be taught across grade and age levels by modifying the prompts and materials provided.

Time Needed:

Two 90-minute class blocks, plus 30 minutes for viewing the documentaries.

Common Core Standards:

Standards covered will vary depending on the grade level but will focus on the ELA – Speaking and Listening standards. Below is an example from an applicable 8th grade standard:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.B](#) - Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

Essential Question (EQ) [What question will all students be able to answer at the end of the lesson?]:

What issues are important in my area and what can be done to help solve them?

Learning Objectives (LOs) [What will most students be able to do at the end of the lesson?; list 1-3 beginning with “Students will be able to...”]:

Students will be able to explain the details and importance of a local issue by creating a speedy mini-documentary of three minutes in length during one class block.

Key Vocabulary Terms [What vocabulary terms will students need to know to complete this lesson?]:

Documentary

Local Issues

Learning Activities

Before the lesson – 90 minutes or more, spread over several days (teacher preference)

Begin by explaining that Indigenous activists around the world have been working to better various issues in their own community, and globally, for centuries. As an example, provide students with this literature guide on Rigoberta Menchú. This guide is available in English and Spanish and provides students with an introduction to Menchú’s activism. In this guide, students will read a short excerpt from her book “I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala/Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia” and answer some discussion questions. These questions can be answered by students individually or as a group.

Please note: this literature guide was created for upper secondary school students. As a result, it’s reading level is high. That being said, it can definitely be used in younger classrooms with scaffolding or by shortening the activity. Some tools for adapting and differentiating written material are listed in this article by [Assistive Technology Tools and Resources](#).

Once the guide is completed, explain that students will be following Menchú’s example and will bring attention to an issue that is of concern in their local area. They will do this by creating their own “speedy mini documentaries”. As every area is different, these issues will vary. Resources specific to New Mexico (where the LAll is

based) are listed in the resource section below, although presenting examples issues and organizations relevant to your local area is strongly encouraged.

Ask students to explore local issues and organizations addressing those issues in a way that is accessible to your class (guided internet search, or similar). While this is happening, ask students to brainstorm local issues that are of concern to them. Connect each local issue to a local organization which is working to address it. Write the list on the board and ask students to rank their top three preferences of issues they would like to address. These will be used to create groups for the mini-documentary making.

A few days before the mini-documentary making occurs, assign students to their groups based on preference. Explain that, during the next class block, they will be tasked with creating a short (maximum three minutes) documentary that explains this issue and highlights its importance. Provide students with examples, [such as these](#) (underscore that students are not expected to match the production quality of these documentaries in a classroom setting). What unites these documentaries? Ask students whether these short documentaries remind them of any other type of media (they may answer “TikTok” or “Instagram stories” or similar). Underscore that these documentaries are a specific form of media and discuss how these are different, and similar, to social media video.

These documentaries will be created in the form that is most accessible to students – voice recording, smartphone recording, etc. If technology is not available to record the documentary, students may present their work to the class as if it were being recorded. Explain that, given the constraints of the activity (it is being completed in a classroom, etc.) student work may have to incorporate elements that do not occur in many documentaries – for example, no location-based filming.

Opening - 10 minutes

When students enter the classroom, ask them to answer the lesson’s “Do Now” questions: Which local issue will you be focusing on during your mini-documentary? Why is this issue important?”

After thinking time, students will be prompted to answer the question verbally or in writing (on paper or in the video call chat box).

The teacher will ask two students to share their answers with the class (one volunteer, one cold call).

Provide students with the learning objectives and road map for the lesson (“What are we doing today and why is it important?”):

- Students will be able to explain the details and importance of a local issue by creating a speedy mini-documentary of three minutes in length during one class block.

Direct Instruction (I Do) - 10 minutes

Explain that students will spend the class making their documentary. They are able to use any resources at their disposal (the internet, books in the classroom, art materials, etc.) to create this documentary. These documentaries will be created in the form that is most accessible to students – voice recording, smartphone recording, etc. If technology is not available to record the documentary, students may present their work to the class as if it were being recorded.

Explain that the documentary should answer the following questions:

- Who is involved in this issue?
- Which local organizations are addressing this issue?
- What is the issue?
- When did this issue take place? Is it ongoing?
- Where is this issue located?
- Why is this issue important?
- How did this issue come to be?
- What can be done to improve this issue?

All information presented should be factual but encourage students to be as creative as they can within the constraints provided.

Group Work (We Do) - Planning - 30 minutes

Provide students with dedicated time to plan their documentary, as well as a [storyboarding worksheet](#). This can be used as a “graphic organizer” to plan the flow of their documentary.

Students may use this time to research the issue using the resources at their disposal. Circulate to check for understanding and to answer questions.

Group Work (We Do) - Making - 30 minutes

Students make their documentaries. If possible, allow students to complete this in a large area – such as outside the classroom or in a larger room. Circulate to check for understanding and to answer questions.

Independent Assessment (You Do) - 5 minutes

Once students complete and turn in their documentaries, ask them to answer the following question as their exit ticket - “What can be done to improve the issue shown in your documentary?”

Assessment

Teacher will determine student mastery by assessing their responses to the assessment assignment above, as well as by the completed documentaries.

Closure - 5 minutes

To close, the teacher restates the learning objectives, provides extension resources if students wish to learn more, and answers any last questions. The also explain that students will watch/listen to each other’s documentaries in the next lesson.

After the lesson – 30 minutes or more (teacher preference)

As students watch each other's documentaries, ask them to note the following aspects of each documentary on a sheet of paper.

- Who is involved in this issue?
- Which local organizations are addressing this issue?
- What is the issue?
- When did this issue take place? Is it ongoing?
- Where is this issue located?
- Why is this issue important?
- How did this issue come to be?
- What can be done to improve this issue?

Once all the documentaries have been watched, ask students to answer the following question: Other than your own, which documentary was your favorite and why? Explain the importance of this local issue and what can be done to improve it.

Lesson Materials [What is needed to teach this lesson?; include worksheets, links, etc.]

Recording device is available (smartphones, voice recorders); if none are available, lesson can be modified so that students present and act out their documentaries to the class.

Differentiation and Modification Options [How can this lesson be modified to reach all students?]:

Content: see resources below for different forms of content (videos, podcasts, etc.)

Process: students can work individually or with a trusted partner on assignments if they prefer.

Product: students may provide their assessment work in a format that best suits them (PowerPoint, podcast, poster, writing, etc.).

Learning Environment: lesson can be provided in an in-person, virtual, or hybrid format using drawing software such as Jamboard or [MS Paint](#).

Extension resources: students may explore the resources provided below for extra content and evidence for their assessment work.

English Language Learners (ELLs): Vocab words defined in detail during direct instruction; can use notes in assessments; extended time.

IEPs and 504s; lesson can be modified in content, process, and product to reflect learning accommodations.

Acknowledgements

This lesson plan incorporates a resource from Santa Rosa Junior College.

Resources Specific to This Lesson Plan [What other resources on this topic are available?]:

Resources on making documentaries in the classroom:

- [Ecuador's Oil Legacy: Media Skills, Justice, & Preservation](#) - Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Tulane University (an incredible teaching unit which combines content regarding oil drilling in Ecuador with a creative project)
- [Deconstructing the Documentary](#) - PBS Learning Media
- [5-Minute Film Festival: Resources for Filmmaking in the Classroom](#) - Edutopia
- [Placing Identity: Planning a Documentary Filmmaking Project](#) - Pulitzer Center
- [Unit Plan: Documentary](#) - Teaching Media Literacy
- [Documentary film + filmmaking for the classroom](#) - Documentary Australia Foundation

Resources on local issues in New Mexico:

- [Yucca New Mexico](#)
- [Navajo Water Project](#)
- [350 New Mexico Climate Ribbon Project](#)
- [350 New Mexico Climate Activism](#)