

Character Action Media

March for Our Lives – Citizenship in Action

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. If you choose 2 sessions you can use the discussion questions, journal writing and extended activities designated by session (A), and session (B). Instructors should feel free to use whichever activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues and an overview of the story before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students appreciate:

- the fullness of citizenship in understanding that the privileges and rights of being a citizen also come with duties and responsibilities to serve and improve our nation and community
- that a caring person is someone who is also a good citizen in working for justice and to improve our nation and community
- the importance of solidarity in working with others to affect change
- the importance of wisdom in striving to positively impact our nation and community by being effective, and to judge what is true and will have lasting value
- the importance of respect for others in truly listening and taking into account other people's views on issues

Primary Virtues

Citizenship: the duties, rights, and privileges that come from being citizen of a nation, state or city

Duty: something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards, moral beliefs or legal obligation, especially as it relates to being a citizen

Secondary Virtues

Caring: a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation; compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Respect for Ourselves / Others: showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of ourselves and others, and other people's views on various issues

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, lasting

Leader Introduction

The national March for Our Lives took place on March 24th in cities across America as a call to action to reduce gun violence in our nation. The march was a response to the horrific shooting in Parkland, Florida when 17 students were killed by another former student. Sadly, this is one of many incidences of gun violence in schools across America, and reminds us of the continuing violence that occurs daily in too many of our communities. The students and parents in Parkland, Florida could have accepted the tragedy and done their best to move forward within their own lives, but in addition they also chose to lead a movement that is working to change the laws and regulations surrounding guns with the hope that they will reduce gun violence and save lives. Character Action Media does not support specific public policies and will leave that up to your class or group to discuss, but we do support the caring and citizenship that these students are living out as they attempt to affect positive change within our communities and nation.

Film Clips:

We will view one film clip that presents a positive view on the March for Our Lives and then another clip that presents some criticisms. In discussing public policy issues, it's important for each of us to consider all sides of an issue, even the side we may not initially agree with, as we search for effective solutions.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/23/politics/lead-march-for-our-lives-preview-jake-tapper/index.html>

<http://video.foxnews.com/v/5757923302001/>(please start the video from 3:17)

Leader Summary

The March for our Lives movement was successful in inspiring hundreds of thousands of people across America to march and to advocate to our elected representatives that they enact new laws and regulations that they hope will reduce gun violence. It will be interesting to see if their actions will result in new legislation and other reforms, and importantly, whether these changes will actually reduce gun violence. We may not all agree on every proposal the movement advocates for, or may think they are missing other key reforms, but we can all agree on the goal of working to reduce gun violence. We can also find inspiration from these students' sense of citizenship in their willingness to care enough to work to improve our nation, their willingness to lead, and from their example on how to organize and motivate others.

Discussion Question Options (discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed)

Before beginning our discussion let's read over the virtues and their definitions (included within the online lesson as a separate document).

1. Does it surprise you that mostly high school students have been able to begin and then lead a movement as large as March for Our Lives?
Do you think that after this movement, more young people will work to become involved in other public policy issues? What are some of these other issues? (A)
2. Why do you think the student leaders of this movement have been able to motivate so many other people to join them in their movement?
(the issue of gun violence is compelling and almost everyone agrees it needs to be reduced; most people believe our political leaders from both parties and government institutions haven't done enough to reduce gun violence) (A)
3. What specific virtues are the student leaders living out and how?
(caring for others in wanting to make schools safer; citizenship in living with a sense of duty to improve our nation; solidarity in uniting others around a shared common purpose; wisdom in being effective in their actions to motivate others to join their movement; we need to wait to see whether their actions are also wise in being effective in resulting in new laws and regulations and whether these will actually reduce gun violence) (A)
4. In the CNN interview, Emma Gonzales spoke about how she deals with bullying at school, and now when she is criticized rudely for her views and leadership on the addressing gun violence. What is her advice and do you think this is effective?
(Emma tries to use humor to combat bullying by laughing it off, and when possible using the criticism to make a joke out of it.) (A)
5. Some have criticized the March for Our Lives movement in focusing too much on more laws and regulations and not enabling other voices to be heard that advocate for reducing gun violence through policies such as better mental health services and trained armed guards at schools. Do you think these criticisms are correct?
(Some points to consider: building a platform and movement where a variety of views and even opposing views are heard is more likely to result in a better understanding of the total issue and policies that will be more effective, however, if the movement focuses on airing a variety of views and doesn't advocate for one set of changes, will it be effective in motivating political leaders to respond and enact better policies?)
Do you think that as a country we are having enough of an open discussion and truly listening to different views on how to reduce gun violence, or are we talking past each other with pre-conceived ideas? (B)
6. Let's have a discussion on what we think are the best measures and strategies for keeping our own school safe? (B)

7. Now let's discuss what new legislation or regulations we think our nation as a whole should adopt, if any, to reduce gun violence. This discussion is outlined as the first Extended Activity below. (B)
8. Do you think March for Our Lives will succeed in motivating congress to enact new laws and regulations?
What actions can students, and any movement seeking political change, enact to increase their chances for actually enacting positive change?
(write emails to elected officials advocating for your beliefs; when you are of age vote for candidates who support what you believe in; get involved by encouraging others to vote for those candidates; financially support candidates and groups who support your beliefs) (B)

Journal Writing Option

1. Write out a statement of your beliefs on what new laws and regulations, if any, our nation and schools should enact to reduce gun violence. Please include the reasons to support your views. This statement can then be sent to your elected representatives – outlined in the 2nd extended activity. (B)

Extended Activities Option

1. Let's discuss what new legislation or regulations we think our nation as a whole should adopt, if any, to reduce gun violence. Let's start with a discussion of the measures the leaders the measures March for Our Lives is advocating for as stated on its website <https://marchforourlives.com/sign/>
"We support the right of law-abiding Americans to keep and bear arms, as set forth in the United States Constitution. But with that right comes responsibility.
We call on all the adults in Congress elected to represent us, to pass legislation that will protect and save children from gun violence. Our elected officials MUST ACT by:
 1. Passing a law to ban the sale of assault weapons like the ones used in Las Vegas, Orlando, Sutherland Springs, Aurora, Sandy Hook and, most recently, to kill 17 innocent people and injured more than a dozen others at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Of the 10 deadliest shootings over the last decade, seven involved the use of assault weapons. No civilian should be able to access these weapons of war, which should be restricted for use by our military and law enforcement only. These guns have no other purpose than to fire as many bullets as possible and indiscriminately kill anything they are pointed at with terrifying speed.

2. Prohibiting the sale of high-capacity magazines such as the ones the shooter at our school—and so many other recent mass shootings used. States that ban high-capacity magazines have half as many shootings involving three or more victims as states that allow them. Limiting the number of bullets a gun can discharge at one time will at least force any shooter to stop and reload, giving children a chance to escape.

3. Closing the loophole in our background check law that allows dangerous people who shouldn't be allowed to purchase firearms to slip through the cracks and buy guns online or at gun shows. 97 percent of Americans support closing the current loopholes in our background check system. When Connecticut passed a law requiring background checks on all handgun sales, they saw a 40 percent reduction in gun homicides. 22 percent of gun sales in this country take place without a background check. That's millions of guns that could be falling into dangerous hands. A background check should be required on every gun sale, no exceptions. The children of this country can no longer go to school in fear that each day could be their last."

We should also include in our discussion potential reforms not stated by the March for Our Lives leadership such as having an armed guard or an armed and trained teacher in each school, better health services for those suffering with mental illness and prone to violence, the influence of violent video games and entertainment, and any other ideas you may have.

We will run our discussion like a debate where each person speaking should address whether he/she agrees or disagrees with what the previous person said and why, and then present his/her new point. This is good practice to help all of us become better listeners.

4. Let the elected officials that represent you in your state government and in Congress know your beliefs on how to reduce gun violence. These officials do monitor the views of those who live in their districts so your voices are important. You can find your representative for the House of Representatives and your US senators through the web sites below that also enable you to send them an email.

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> (key in your zip code and then click on the email envelop below your representative's photo.)

<https://www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm> (scroll to the bottom of this page to find your Senator and then click on their name)

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