Student Service Learning Guide

Grade 7 English

Student Service Learning Activities in Middle School Courses

In Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) all middle school students participate in student service learning (SSL) activities that are infused into the curriculum taught in Grade 6 science, Grade 7 English, and Grade 8 social studies. The attached lesson plans are models that can be used to embed SSL activities into the existing curriculum.

The following guidelines provide an overview of the broader SSL requirements and expectations in MCPS. More comprehensive SSL information is available by contacting the school SSL coordinator or visiting the MCPS SSL website www.mcpsssl.org.

The three required phases of SSL activities are as follows:

Preparation. The community need is identified, background knowledge is developed, and student expectations are stated.

Action. The identified community need is addressed through at least one of three ways:
Direct Action—students are face to face with the recipients of their service, such as in tutoring, visiting children in hospitals, and serving at soup kitchens.
Indirect Action—students have no direct contact with the service recipients, such as in collecting food and clothing or conducting fund–raising events.
Advocacy Action—students work to raise awareness or create change, such as in participating in community events, writing letters, giving legislative testimony, or creating public service announcements.

Reflection. Students look back on both the service and learning they experience and its significance to their personal growth, the service recipients, and the community.

Working with Nonprofit Tax–exempt Organizations. All SSL activities must be conducted with preapproved organizations. Organizations and Opportunities must be tagged as MCPS SSL–approved at www.mcpsssl.org or they must be preapproved by the SSL coordinator after the student has completed and submitted MCPS Form 560–50: *Request for Student Service Learning Preapproval.*
Note:
   ▪ No door–to–door solicitation is allowed.
   ▪ All activities must be conducted with adult supervision from MCPS personnel or nonprofit representatives in a public place.
   ▪ All activities must be secular in nature.

Regarding Reflection. Oral reflection activities may be conducted as whole–class discussions in preparation for individual student–written reflections. As with all other SSL activities, students must complete the standard MCPS Form 560–51: *Student Service Learning Activity Verification,* to record their reflection and document the service infused in the curriculum area. A completed verification form will be filed in each student's SSL folder.

Documenting the Hours. Ten SSL hours may be earned through successful participation in the SSL aspects of each middle school course—Grade 6 science, Grade 7 English, and Grade 8 social studies. Students who complete the preparation, action, and reflection phases of the activity, *and* successfully complete the course, receive 10 SSL hours. These hours automatically appear on student report cards at the end of each middle school year. No partial hours can be awarded. If a student does not complete the infused SSL activities for the course, MCPS Form 560–54: *Deletion of Student Service Learning (SSL) Hours,* must be completed and submitted to the school SSL coordinator.

Best Practices of Student Service Learning

1. The Student Meets a Recognized Need in the Community.
   - Examines pressing community needs. (preparation)
   - Strategizes to address problems associated with community needs. (preparation)
   - Provides direct, indirect, and/or advocacy service. (action)

2. The Student Achieves Curricular Objectives.
   - Uses academic standards to establish mastery objectives. (preparation)
   - Applies academic learning to recognized community needs. (preparation, action, reflection)
   - Assesses progress toward mastery of objectives. (preparation, action)

3. The Student Gains Necessary Knowledge and Skills.
   - Explores citizenship and career options. (preparation, action)
   - Understands expectations associated with participation. (preparation)
   - Cooperates with team members and community partners. (action)

4. The Student Plans Ahead.
   - Identifies tasks, timelines, and outcomes. (preparation)
   - Assesses own skills and interests. (preparation)
   - Takes leadership opportunities. (preparation, action)

5. The Student Works with Existing Service Organizations.
   - Identifies nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations with which to partner. (preparation)
   - Creates collaborative, reciprocal relationships through involvement. (action)
   - Respects the dignity and contributions of others. (action, reflection)

6. The Student Develops Responsibility.
   - Evaluates own performance. (reflection)
   - Strengthens character through civic engagement. (action)
   - Participates in a range of service opportunities. (action)

7. The Student Reflects Throughout the Experience.
   - Evaluates overall impact of service and learning. (reflection)
   - Analyzes what was learned from multiple perspectives. (reflection)
   - Explores next steps to continue service-learning involvement. (reflection)

2-06 Adapted from *Maryland's Best Practices: An Improvement Guide for School-based Service Learning.*

Session 1: Preparation

- Remove the letter to school student, parent, and/or guardian in this guide.
- Make copies of it for your students.
- Distribute the letter to each student in your class to share with his/her parent/guardian.
- Notify parents of each student's SSL activities, occuring as part of the instructional program. This is a requirement of the Maryland State Department of Education.
- Meet with school media specialist to discuss ways to support the SSL effort.

Session 1: *Preparation*   Time: Two 45-Minute Class Periods

English Indicators
    2.7.1.4 Analyze important ideas and messages in informational text.
    2.7.1.6 Read critically to evaluate informational text.

Enduring Understanding
    Where I am affects who I am.

Essential Question
    How does place influence behavior?

Resources
    The Melting Pot, by Anna Quindlen
    Light Voting Guidelines, Sample

Overview

In this session students identify and discuss the needs of a specific community in Anna Quindlen's essay, *The Melting Pot*. Building on a greater understanding of a community's needs, students then identify and list the needs within their community. Students select one need in their community that they plan to address through their student service learning (SSL) project.

1. Activating Thinking About Community Needs

Ask students to think-pair-share the different kinds of needs present in a community. Encourage them to consider needs that are visible such as the following:
- Public safety
- Food, shelter, and clothing
- Public access for people with disabilities

Challenge students to consider other needs such as the following:
- Access to documents for English language learners
- Freedom from harassment or intimidation
- Privacy

Have students share responses and what they know about the more obvious community needs, as well as those less noticeable. Help students understand some of the needs individuals face that go unnoticed to many within the community. Point out that the needs within the community could be met through small actions that have a significant impact. Help students think of the needs of others that are often overlooked.

2. Exploring Community Needs Through the Essay

Distribute highlighters and copies of Anna Quindlen's essay, *The Melting Pot*, found on page 19 of the *English 7 Instructional Guide, Unit Two: A Sense of Place*. In small groups or pairs, have students read aloud the essay and highlight passages that reveal needs within the community. Elicit responses from students that address needs perceived by the author. These may include the following:
- Tolerance for cultural diversity
- A common language
- Getting to know others in the neighborhood
- Understanding between older and younger generations
- Reduction of crime
- Dealing with change

Ask probing questions such as the following:
- Do students agree that the conditions presented are really needs?
- Which needs seem more important?
- Are some needs "personal needs" or are they all "community needs"?
- Which needs are easier to address?

Discuss whether the needs of the community in *The Melting Pot* are present in other communities. Ask students to consider how "place" influences the behaviors of the individuals within a community. Some communities consist of apartments; others include townhouses, condominiums, or single-family homes. Have students consider how these factors influence a community's needs.

3. Identifying Needs of a Local Community

Have students work in pairs to generate a list of needs within their local community. A need may be identified within the school, neighborhood, or broader community.

Ask students to share their lists and clarify the needs they have identified. Allow time for discussion if students need further clarification.

List the needs on newsprint or a transparency. Explain to students that the list is additive not repetitive. If duplicates arise, ask the contributor whether it is the same or different. If the student indicates that it is different, honor the distinction and let it remain on the list.

Before moving on to the next stage, ask students once more if they need any further clarification.

4. Reaching Agreement Through Light Voting

Explain to students that they will be using a consensus tool known as light voting to reach an agreement about a community need they can address as a class service-learning project. Using the Sample Light Voting Guidelines as a resource, explain to students that light voting is a decision-making process that gives everyone equal voice and moves the group closer to agreement. Light voting "sheds light" on ideas that are of greatest interest to the group. Begin by referring to the list of community needs created by the class. Determine the number of votes students can cast—this is the number of items divided by three. For example, 12 items would be divided by 3 to equal 4. Each student has four votes. Have students cast their votes. Tally the votes and discuss results.

Help students understand that the results of light voting aren't the final decision. The process simply reveals where the interest of most of the group lies. This is one piece of information that the class can use to reach a thoughtful decision about a need they can get behind and address.

Once students have selected a community issue they wish to address, consider presenting the idea to other seventh grade classes. Consult other seventh grade teachers and discuss the issues other classes have shown. Teachers may wish to make the service-learning project a grade-level effort.

5. Checking for Understanding

Check for understanding by having students do a three-minute quick-write describing the possible impact of their service-learning project. Have students explain what success would look like once they complete their service-learning project. Establish that their quick-write should explain how the need has been addressed and how it changes the community.

Bibliography
Quindlen, Anna. 1989. *Living out loud*. Random House. (Copyright secured by MCPS.)

Light Voting Guidelines (Sample)

Topic/Student	1	2	3	4	5	SUM
Recycling	3	1	0	3	3	10
Clothing for homeless	1	3	1	2	1	8
Food for soup kitchen	0	0	3	1	0	4
Speaking to County Council	0	0	0	0	2	2
Tutoring first graders in reading	2	2	2	0	0	6
SUM	6	6	6	6	6	30

Step 1: Explain the Process
- Show students an example of a light voting tally.
- Explain that light voting helps students see where the greatest interest lies around a topic.

Step 2: Post/Refer to List of Ideas

Step 3: Determine the Number of Votes
- Count the number of items on the list and divide by 3. This will be the number of votes each student has. Example: 12 items would be divided by 3 to equal 4. Each student receives four votes.

Step 4: Cast Votes
- Each student decides which items are important and casts his or her vote.

First Choice   = 4 points
Second Choice   = 3 points
Third Choice   = 2 points
Fourth Choice   = 1 point

- Student posts the number of points next to each item and casts vote.

Step 5: Tally Votes
- Add up number of votes per idea.
- Record on chart.

Step 6: Discuss Results
- Discuss results and decide how to come to a final decision.

Session 2: *Action*

English
4.7.1.1 Apply comprehension skills by
selecting, reading, and interpreting a variety of
print and electronic informational texts.
7.7.7.1 Demonstrate appropriate organizational
strategies and delivery techniques for a variety
of oral presentation purposes.

Enduring Understanding
Where I am affects who I am.

Essential Question
How does place influence behavior?

Resources
Suggested Online Resources
Strategic Planning Sheet
Action Planning Sheet

Overview

The goal of this session is to research a community need, then plan and implement the classroom Student Service Learning project. Through teacher modeling, students research the local need identified in Session 1 and develop an action plan for *direct action, indirect action*, or *advocacy action.* After contacting a community nonprofit organization, students perform service learning. Solicit support from the school media specialist.

1. Activating Thinking

Inform students that they will be performing research in the media center on the community need they selected in Session 1. Ask your media specialist to provide students with some effective search procedures such as evaluating print and electronic resources as well as using key words to locate information within a site. Have students think-pair-share possible sources of information about local agencies that would be suitable for a service-learning project.

2. Modeling Research

Take students to the media center and ask them to imagine that they are researching how to make clothing donations to a homeless shelter. Model a search for agencies on the Montgomery County Government website at montgomerycountymd.gov/volunteer. Using the think-aloud strategy, go to Student Service Learning. Search for a nonprofit organization that donates clothing. As you search the website, ask the following questions aloud and elicit student responses:
- Where can I find the names of nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations that serve our local community?
- How can I tell which agencies distribute clothing for those in need?
- Where can I look for the name of a contact person at this agency?
- If I cannot find any information on the website, where else might I look?

Have a student recorder write responses to these questions on newsprint for class members to see and use when they conduct their research later.

In addition to researching a local nonprofit organization, have the media specialist refer to the suggested online resource bank and have students search for other materials that will support the service-learning project.

3. Researching an Organization

Explain to students that they will work in pairs at a media center computer to locate organizations that address the community need chosen earlier by the class. With the help of the media specialist, monitor students carefully to ensure that they are finding appropriate organizations that address the community need chosen. If necessary, interrupt the research process to provide direct instruction to those students who need additional support. Students should list the names of agencies found in their research and record information about the agencies for later discussion and decision making.

Develop a list of evaluation criteria from which students will select an appropriate nonprofit organization that addresses the community need chosen earlier by the class. Ask students to decide which agency they should work with, based on the evaluation criteria they established.

After selecting an agency, have students select the type of action they would like to perform:

- *Direct Action*—students are face to face with the recipients of their service, such as in tutoring, visiting children in hospitals, or serving at a soup kitchen.
- *Indirect Action*—students have no direct contact with the service recipients, such as in collecting food and clothing or conducting fund-raising events.
- *Advocacy Action*—students work to raise awareness or create change, such as in participating in rallies and campaigns, writing letters, giving legislative testimony, or creating public service announcements.

Explain to students that the next step in the process is to select a nonprofit organization. Inform students that the class will be reaching a consensus in choosing an organization to work with. Allow time for discussion and sharing information gathered in notes during research. Consider a fallback in the decision-making process, if students cannot reach a consensus, and decide which organization would be most appropriate after gathering input from the class.

4. Contacting an Organization

Once your class has decided on a nonprofit organization to work with, contact the organization as soon as possible. Explain that you are looking for an opportunity for your students to perform service learning with their organization. Come to a mutual agreement about what type of service the students can provide the organization. Consider having a representative come to your school to work with students to create an action plan.

5. Developing a Pathway to Action

Distribute the Strategic Planning Sheet resource to students. Have them develop an action plan to carry out the service-learning project using the following process:

A. Present the Pathway to Action
Summarize for students what the service-learning project is and the name of the organization with which they will work. State the type of action they will carry out—*direct action, indirect action,* or *advocacy action.* Explore the context of the service-learning project by explaining why the project is important and the impact this work will have on others. Identify resources and support needed to complete the task.

B. Define Success
Elicit from students various views of the ideal results of the student-learning project. Build agreement on what success looks like when the service-learning project is completed.

C. Develop a Strategy
Identify possible ways to achieve the desired results. In small groups, have students use the Strategic Planning Sheet resource to generate a strategic plan for implementing the service-learning project. Have students begin by identifying the community need, and then develop a sequence of steps to address the need, and finally define a successful outcome of their efforts. Have student groups share their plans. Evaluate the plans and build agreement on the best way to proceed by selecting a strategic plan for the project.

Discuss the roles needed to complete the project. Assign student roles, making sure to provide opportunities for students to assume leadership of small, task-oriented groups within the class.

Continue using the Strategic Planning Sheet resource to track action steps taken along the way. Describe the necessary action as explicitly as possible, including identifying who is accountable for ensuring that the action gets done and the date by which the action must be completed. Refer to the Action Planning Sheet regularly and add to it as decisions call for more action.

D. Create an Implementation Timeline
Create a timeline for the project and post it in the classroom. Check progress and make adjustments as necessary.

6. Implementing Student Service Learning

Students and teacher should agree on an action plan—what, who, when. Everyone should agree on how the action will be evaluated. Have students implement the action plan agreed to earlier; the teacher should monitor the process and make changes as necessary.

Record the service learning through photographs in the school or local community and public service announcements. Keep accurate records of what is accomplished. Consider the different ways to share results with the school through announcements, the PTSA newsletter, or local media.

7. Checking for Understanding

Conduct a plus/delta evaluation while implementing the action plan in order to continuously improve performance. Elicit pluses first before conducting deltas. Begin each delta with an action verb to ensure that the focus is on changing the process. Conduct one final plus/delta session on completion of the SSL project.

Suggested Online Resources

MCPS media specialists can provide considerable support for searching online resources. Since online resources change with time, please check with your school media specialist before beginning the project, so she or he can help locate appropriate resources.

Listed below are organizations that support SSL directly by providing information about local agencies or serving as a resource for ideas and examples of exceptional SSL projects and programs throughout the United States.

The Character Education Partnership

> The Character Education Partnership is dedicated to the moral and civic development of our nation's youth. Eleven principles serve as criteria for creating a caring school community.
> Link: www.character.org

Montgomery County Government

> Your local connection to SSL. The Volunteer Center lists agencies with activities that are preapproved for SSL hours.
> Link: www.montgomerycountymd.gov

Peace Corps, Paul Coverdell World Wise Schools

> Valuable information on definition of service learning,
> getting started, project ideas, lesson plans, and links to other sites.
> Link: www.peacecorps.gov/wws/service/getstarted/slmodel.html
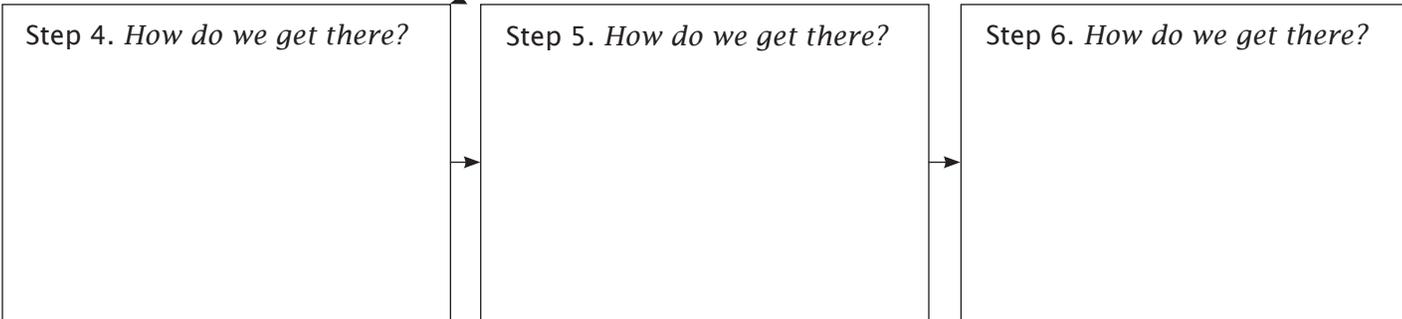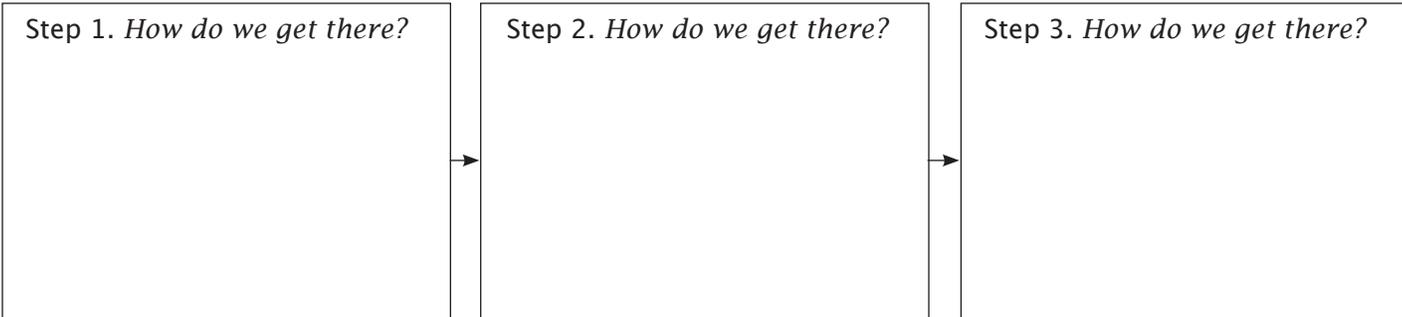
Power of Five

> Created by America's Promise and Weekly Reader; well suited for students
> 11-14 as they engage in SSL. Students are encouraged to fulfill
> "five promises" around the five critical needs of children.
> Link: www.poweroffive.org

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

> Information about the MSDE student service learning diploma requirement.
> Definitions, Best Practices, MSDE SSL Guidelines, etc.
> www.mdservice-learning.org

Strategic Planning Sheet

Present Situation: *What is the Community Need?*

Step 1. *How do we get there?*

Step 2. *How do we get there?*

Step 3. *How do we get there?*

Step 4. *How do we get there?*

Step 5. *How do we get there?*

Step 6. *How do we get there?*

Definition of Success: *What kind of impact do we hope to have in the community?*

Action Planning Sheet

In order to keep track of decisions that require action, write down each action, the person responsible for carrying out the action, and the date the action is to be completed.

Continue to update the action plan during the implementation phase of the service–learning project.

Action	Person Responsible	Due Date

Session 3: *Reflection*

English Indicators
    4.7.2.2 Write to inform using a variety of
    forms, including summaries, essays, news
    articles, business and personal letters, and
    research papers.
    4.7.2.1 Write to express personal ideas using
    a variety of forms, including poetry, drama,
    narration, and personal essay.

Enduring Understanding
    Where I am affects who I am.

Essential Question
    How does place influence behavior?

Resources
    Reflection Letter Essential Elements
    Reflection Letter Prompt
    Reflection Letter Rubric
    MCPS Form 560–51: *Student
    Service Learning Activity
    Verification Form*

Overview

Students in this final session use the quick-writes, discussions, research, and records they cre-ated during service learning to reflect on the challenges and successes they experienced. They organize their information and write a reflection letter to their teacher that they will add to their English portfolio, and then complete the MCPS Form 560–51: *Student Service Learning Activity Verification,* which they will submit to the school SSL coordinator.

1. Activating Thinking

Notify students ahead of time that they will need to locate and gather information necessary for reflection on their service learning. They will use the quick-writes and discussion and research notes they have collected throughout the project. On the day that students will write, explain that they are participating in the reflection phase of SSL. Point out that they will also be documenting their service. A completed MCPS Form 560–51 must be turned in to the teacher for review, then passed to the school SSL coordinator for filing in the student's SSL folder.

2. Organizing for Reflection

Help students structure their reflection by reviewing the Reflection Letter Essential Elements:

- Quick-write reflection
- Light Voting tally sheet
- Research notes
- Discussion notes
- Photographs, correspondence, or records that document the learning project

Explain that students will write their reflection letters after they have reviewed the information.

3. Beginning the Reflection Process

Explain to students that their reflection letter must contain a *personal response* to—

- the ideas in their Quick-write in Session 1,
- their role in the service learning, and
- the impact of the service on themselves.

as well as an evaluation of the—

- Light Voting process and results,
- effectiveness and value of the research process,
- effectiveness of the strategic planning,
- implementation of the service-learning project, and
- impact of the service learning on others.

4. Writing the Reflection Letter

The reflection letter helps students reflect on the value of service learning and the role they play in carrying out a successful project. Distribute the Reflection Letter Prompt as a guide to students. Teachers may choose to have students go through the writing process—prewriting organizers, first draft, revise/edit, final draft—when writing the letter, or shorten the process and require only an organizer and a final draft.

5. Providing Feedback

The reflection letter serves as an important component of SSL by providing evidence of learning and participation. Therefore, the Reflection Letter Rubric helps both the teacher and students to understand how a grade is determined. Considering the effort and time that students devoted to the project, the teacher may wish to consider other methods of feedback. One option is to write a brief note to each student. Another is recognition through a small celebration, with the service agency representative calling out the efforts and accomplishments of all the students who participated in the project. Student-teacher conferences are another way to provide feedback.

6. Completing the Process

Once students have completed their reflection letter, distribute MCPS Form 560-51: *Student Service Learning Activity Verification*. Students complete this form and submit it to the classroom teacher who reads it, signs off, and then forwards it to the school SSL coordinator for filing.

Reflection Letter Essential Elements

- Quick–write Reflection

- Light Voting Tally Sheet

- Research Notes

- Discussion Notes

- Photographs, Correspondence, Records

- Other pieces, as determined by teacher, student, or agency

Write the reflection letter after you have gathered the necessary documentation.

Reflection Letter Prompt

Throughout your SSL project you have had the opportunity to identify a community need, plan how to address it, and implement a process to meet the need. You have worked individually and as a class in service to others. Now it is time to pause and reflect on how you have grown and consider the impact you have had on your community.

Once you have gathered the information you need, take some time to reflect on the work you did to make the SSL project a success for you and the community. Then write a reflection letter to your teacher explaining how you grew as a result of the work you did to improve your community. As you prepare to write, consider the following:

- How have you grown as a result of your role in the SSL project?

    - Locate your quick-write in Session 1. Have your ideas changed as a result of the service-learning project?

    - What role did you play in your class project? What were your strengths in this role?

    - Where can you still grow?

    - Would you excel in another role? Which one? Why?

- What impact did you have on the success of your class SSL project?

    - Select samples of correspondence, feedback, and photographs that reflect the work done to meet the community need.

    - What did you contribute to the process?

    - What obstacles did you meet?

    - How did you overcome those obstacles? If you were not able to overcome them, what prevented you?

- What are you most proud of as a result of your SSL involvement?

    - Were you challenged?

    - Did your class project have a significant impact on the community?

    - Did you learn something positive about another person?

    - Has this experience given you an idea of a related need that you could address personally at a later time?

Reflection Letter Rubric

Throughout your SSL project you have had the opportunity to identify a community need, plan how to address it, and implement a process to meet the need. You have worked individually and as a class in service to others. Now it is time to pause and reflect on how you have grown and consider the impact you have had on your community. Once you have organized your materials, reflect on your experience. Then write a reflection letter to your teacher explaining how you have grown from your role in the project and the impact your work has had on the community.

Ideas and Development	Details show personal growth and community impact as a result of the service-learning project. Self-reflection is evident in the writing.	1 2 3 4 5
Organization	The letter is sequenced to focus on growth, impact, and personal contribution.	1 2 3 4 5
Voice	Voice reflects a sincere interest in the project.	1 2 3 4 5
Word Choice	Language is precise and clear as it describes obstacles, challenges, and successes.	1 2 3 4 5
Sentence Fluency	Sentences begin with a variety of opening phrases.	1 2 3 4 5
Conventions	Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are correct.	1 2 3 4 5