



TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN OPED

Distance Learning Lesson Plan

Lesson Overview

We are in an unprecedented moment in our history. Beyond impacting their everyday lives and experiences, this pandemic will shape young people's faith in government and how responsive it is to community needs. **That's why, in the midst of all of this, we want students to hear loud and clear: in a crisis, our democracy doesn't pause.** At this moment, our young people have thoughts, feelings, and reactions - and we know civics can provide students with an authentic space and guidance to express those responses and use their voices.

In "Write an OpEd" middle and high school students are able to take concrete action and engage in our democracy in a meaningful way by sharing their thoughts, experiences and ideas in an OpEd. On the first day, they will begin by learning how OpEds can be a powerful tool for elevating issues in your community and advocating for change. Students will read student-created examples of OpEd to learn about the four main elements that make up a strong OpEd. On the second day, they will then examine an issue that they care about, decide what they want people to know about this issue and draft their own OpEd. At the end of the second day, students will choose an aspect of their OpEd that they want to share to promote their topic and share over social media. Prior to engaging in this lesson, we strongly encourage you to review the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's guide for Talking to Students About Coronavirus (<https://bit.ly/2wEUrS1>).

Note: This lesson is separated into two parts to allow students sufficient time to understand the key elements of an OpEd, reflect on the message that they want to convey and complete a draft of their own OpEd.

Students will consider the following:

Civic Knowledge The rights, roles, and responsibilities of citizenship, including mechanisms for participating in the political process and influencing public opinion.

Civic Skills Communicate persuasively, both orally and through written work, to mobilize others.

Civic Values Recognition of personal power and agency.

Write an OpEd Lesson Plan

Materials and Preparation:

- Handouts
 - Take Action: What is an OpEd? (PDF <https://bit.ly/2SKFEgB>, Google <https://bit.ly/3ceeExD>)
 - Consider using Rewordify.com to simplify the reading to support your students' learning needs. <https://rewordify.com/>
 - Take Action: Writing My OpEd (PDF <https://bit.ly/2SJtDba>, Google Doc <https://bit.ly/3bbYN1k>)
 - Optional: OpEd Rubric: Can be used to evaluate or self-evaluate the content, organization, style/voice and mechanics of the OpEd. (PDF <https://bit.ly/3dnnJUU> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2SMx2FY>)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the main elements of an OpEd.
- Identify a community-based topic that they want to elevate through writing an OpEd.
- Draft an OpEd elevating their community-based issue and share information on Social Media.

Day One Agenda

- ☐ Do Now: Identify Issues
- ☐ Mini-Lesson: What is an OpEd?
- ☐ Worktime: Examine an OpEd
- ☐ Wrap-up: Reflect

Day Two Agenda

- ☐ Do Now: Reflect
- ☐ Worktime: Tactic: Draft your OpEd
- ☐ Wrap-up: Tactic: Pitch your OpEd

Day 1 Lesson Plan

Take a look at this sidebar for instructional tips!

TIP: These questions may bring up many emotions, thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Prior to engaging your students in this activity, consider reaching out to your school social worker and providing students with information on how to contact them.

TECH TIP: If using virtual facetime (ex. Zoom or Google Hangouts), ask students to speak their answers or share their responses using the “chat” feature.

DO NOW 10 MINS

Identifying Issues

Frame:

- Especially during times of crisis, it can be easy to focus on the problems that are happening in your community and around the world, but it is important to remember that there are many ways to make a positive impact in their community.
- The goal of today’s lesson will be to learn about a way you can elevate issues in your community that you think more people should know more about.
- You will learn what an OpEd is, draft your own, and share your ideas over social media.

Task: Respond to one of the following prompts in your **What is an OpEd?** handout:

- If your Mayor (or other elected official in your community) asked you what was one issue that they should focus on, what would you say? How would you convince them that the issue was important?
- What is something exciting or positive about your community that you wish more people knew about?
- What is one problem in your community that you wish you could fix? How does that problem affect people in your community?

Debrief:

- As you reflect on what you wrote about in the prompt, it is important to remember that there are probably other community members concerned about the issues that you are concerned about. Sharing your thoughts on this topic can be a helpful way to take action and inspire others to join you!

TIP: As an extension activity, consider asking students to explore the OpEd pages of a newspaper. Register for The New York Times free online access <https://nyti.ms/2x0axWu>.

TECH TIP: Consider putting students in small groups (using Zoom break-outs or another platform) to discuss the sample OpEd. If your virtual class is using Zoom, consider creating “Breakout Rooms” ([Tutorial on Managing Breakout Rooms](#))

TECH TIP: If you’re leading a virtual class (Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc) consider the following:

- Ask students to read the document silently and mark the text with questions about terms or concepts.
- Ask students to share their questions and work through the answers as a class.
- Set a visual timer ([YouTube](#) has some neat ones!) and

MINI-LESSON 20 MINS

What is an OpEd?

Frame: Before we can write OpEds of our own, we need to understand what OpEds are, what they are used for, and what key elements make up an OpEd. Follow along in your **What is an OpEd?** handout.

What is an OpEd?

- OpEds are a type of persuasive essay and are probably very similar to something you have written before in English or History class. Writing an OpEd allows you to publish your opinions about an issue and to share these opinions with a broad audience.
- “Op-ed” stands for “**O**pposite the **E**ditorial page.” Newspaper editors share their opinions on the editorial page of the newspaper. On the opposite page, other readers are given space to submit their thoughts.

What are the main elements of an OpEd?

- **Lead/Hook-** Draw the reader into caring about the issue with an interesting hook. Hooks can vary widely but common prompts are:
 - A human interest or personal story.
 - Shocking or powerful numbers/statistics that would grab the readers’ attention.
 - A focus on local and/or timely issues (how the problem affects your and the readers’ community).
 - A situation which most readers can immediately relate to.
- **Argument/Problem** - Explain the issue and why it is a problem.
- **Evidence** - Share information that supports your claim about why the issue is a problem in your community.
 - Points: include statistics and other relevant evidence and research.
 - Counterpoint [OPTIONAL] Predict possible arguments that opponents of your issue might raise and explain and provide reasoning for your disagreement.
 - Note: Some OpEds will also focus on having a **solution** to the problem being presented, but that is not the main focus of this activity. In Generation Citizen’s Action Civics programming, students identify policy-aligned goals and solutions-oriented action. While, this is not the main goal of this lesson, if you are

<p>ask students to answer the questions independently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If using Zoom, consider creating “Breakout Rooms” (Tutorial on Managing Breakout Rooms) where students can collaborate in small groups to respond to the different OpEds. 	<p>familiar with this work and want to use this lesson to guide students to also identify solutions, that is certainly an option.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conclusion/Call to Action- Reiterate how and why the reader should get involved. <p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As you through the sample OpEd written by Julian Viviescas, pay attention to how the individual elements make up the whole OpEd. ● Identify one sentence or phrase that stands out to you as being powerful or interesting. ● Reflect: What about that section jumped out to you? What did you find powerful or interesting? <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being able to identify the main elements of an OpEd will be helpful when you write your own OpEd! In this example, the elements of the OpEd were already outlined for you. In the next step, you will practice identifying the main elements in another OpEd.
<p>TECH TIP: Students can use the features of Google Docs to help them annotate the text. For example, they could add comments or highlight specific sections.</p>	<p>WORK TIME 30 MINS</p> <p>Examine an OpEd</p> <p>Frame: Seeing more examples of an OpEd will help better understand how the four elements on an OpEd work together and better prepare for writing an OpEd of your own.</p> <p>Task: You will now read and annotate a new OpEd on your own:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First Read: Identify the author’s perspective by marking (underlining, highlighting, etc.) the issue or problem they are writing about. ● Second Read: Identify the four main elements of an OpEd: Hook, Argument, Evidence, and Call to Action and respond to the prompts that follow.
	<p>WRAP-UP 2 MINS</p> <p>Reflect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To be a changemaker, it is important that you take action on something that is important to you. ● As you think about Julian writing this OpEd, what do you think inspired him to choose this topic and include the elements that he did?

Day 2 Lesson Plan

Take a look at this sidebar for instructional tips!

TECH TIP: If using virtual facetime (ex. Zoom or Google Hangouts), ask students to speak their answers or share their responses using the “chat” feature.

TECH TIP: If students feel comfortable sharing their Do Now responses, it may be helpful to document student responses. Consider creating a Google Doc or add the prompt to your Google Classroom and have them enter their responses there.

TECH TIP: Consider putting students in small groups (using Zoom break-outs or another platform) to discuss their Topics and Calls to Action.

DO NOW 10 MINS

Reflect

Frame:

- In the previous lesson, you read an example OpEd and were able to identify the main aspects of OpEds. Now, you will begin to work on creating an OpEd yourself. The first step is to decide what topic you want to address in your OpEd.
- As we discussed in the previous lesson, the “Call to Action” part of an OpEd is what typically concludes the OpEd. You want it to leave the reader with a strong feeling and understanding about the issue, why it is important and what they can do about the issue.

Task:

- Think back to the topic that you decided to address in your OpEd. What do you want your “Call to Action” to be?
- Use the following prompts to brainstorm what you want your OpEd to get people to do, think about or believe:
 - What do you want people to do about this issue / topic?
 - Can they take individual action, like checking in on friends and neighbors?
 - Should they take civic action, for example by calling their representatives or boycotting something?
 - Get readers pumped to join your cause!

Debrief:

- Now that you have your “Call to Action,” you will use the work time to draft the other element of an OpEd to support your topic/issue.

TIP: Consider what makes the most sense for you and your students when it comes to conducting research for the OpEd. Students could complete online research, take information in from the news, talk to members of their community, or use personal experience. For this assignment, you may want to give students more direction or just share all of these options for them to choose from.

TIP: You may already have best practices or tools for your students to proofread their work and may want to elevate those.

Note: In the lesson resources, we have shared a rubric which you can use to evaluate student work, but it could also be used for self or peer reflection and evaluation.

WORK TIME 40 MINS

Draft your OpEd

Frame:

- Use the **Customize My OpEd** handout to help you brainstorm all the different elements you will need to put your OpEd together. Keep in mind there is no one right or wrong way to organize your ideas. This guide will help you think about the best way to write yours.

Task:

- Draft your OpEd by filling out your **Customize my OpEd** handout.
- Note:
 - The organizer asks many questions in each section. This is designed to help you think about what you want to say and how you want to say it, but *you do not need to answer all of them*, especially if you feel like you're repeating yourself. Each section is essential, but how you write out your thoughts within each section is up to you!
 - Writing an OpEd, like a lot of writing, is not always linear. You may start with a specific topic in mind and change your mind mid-way through. Or maybe once you start finding your evidence, you decide to change your argument! While there is no right or wrong way to go through this, it is important to remember to reflect on your writing and don't be afraid to change course!

Debrief:

- After filling out each section of your **Writing My OpEd** handout, you have officially created a first draft of your OpEd! Your next step will be to put it all together and proofread it to get it ready to pitch.

Compile and Proofread your OpEd

Frame:

- By completing the last task, you have drafted all aspects of your OpEd! The next step is to take the pieces and put them together into one document so that you can pitch and share your work. You will then need to proofread your OpEd before sharing with anyone for publication.

<p>TECH TIP: As an extension activity, you may consider asking students to add their OpEds into a shared folder where students can read their classmates' work.</p>	<p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compile everything that you wrote in the sections above into a new document. Be sure to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Give the document a name, something like “[LAST NAME] [TOPIC] OpEd” ○ Center the OpEd title at the top ● Proofreading- Use the organizer to check off each step of proofreading your work. <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Congratulations! Your OpEd is ready. The next step is to pitch and share your OpEd to get it in the hands of others.
<p>TIP: If you want students to share their work with local publications, it may be helpful to provide them with some names or ask them to do the research themselves. A good place to start is this resource from the OpEd Project: https://bit.ly/3ftn9ab</p> <p>LOW/NO TECH TIP: You might also consider having students mail in their submission as a low tech option.</p> <p>TIP: Many students do not have social media accounts for a variety of reasons. Consider polling your class using Google</p>	<p>WRAP-UP 10 MINS</p> <p>Tactic: Pitch your OpEd: Post on Social Media</p> <p>Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pitch your idea! The first step in making publishing your OpEd is getting into the hands of newspaper editors who will read it. In order to pitch your idea, you need to 1) reach out to people or publications who may be able to publish the OpEd, and 2) share some information about what you've written. ● Many newspapers and magazines will gladly publish an OpEd - especially student written ones. Here is a website you can use to locate local publications that accept OpEds: https://bit.ly/3ftn9ab <p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Find out who is in charge of op-eds at your local paper - Either visit their website or call their general number at the paper and ask who is in charge of OpEds and get their email address. ● Submit the op-ed - Send in your op-ed. Make sure to include your name, age, phone number and email address. ● Post on social media - Choose one sentence or phrase that you think could grab peoples' attention about the topic of your OpEd. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Post your sentence or phrase on social media adding #democracydoesntpause and tagging @generationcitizen on Instagram or @gencitizen on Twitter. ● Tag newspapers you think would be interested in your OpEd - they might reply!

[Form](#) or [Strawpoll](#) prior to engaging in this lesson

- **Call to follow up** - This is the most important part. You can write the most brilliant op-ed ever, and it's very unlikely to be printed unless you call and make a compelling pitch to get it printed! Choose one sentence or phrase that you think could grab peoples' attention about the topic of your OpEd.

Here are other helpful resources on how to pitch and submit your OpEd to a local paper.

- How to Place an OpEd in Your Local Paper (MoveOn.org) – <https://bit.ly/3c3xl6X>
- Pitching (The OpEd Project) – <https://bit.ly/3fh256w>
- Submission Information (The OpEd Project) – <https://bit.ly/2A0xieh>