

Take Action: Read an OpEd

What is an OpEd?

OpEds are a type of opinion article, or editorial, written by members of the public. Writing an OpEd allows you to publish your opinions about the issue you wrote about in your Do Now and to share these opinions with a broad audience. You can also share the published article with other influencers and decision-makers who could help address your topic.

“Op-ed” stands for “opposite the editorial 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. In a print 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. Today it’s rare to find someone reading a print newspaper today with most people logging onto their favorite newspaper’s website to read about what’s happening in their community and the world. While print newspapers are nearly obsolete (no longer produced), the name for these persuasive essays by members of the public remained. (Are you wondering if print newspapers are really obsolete? Read this OpED to learn more: <https://wapo.st/2Wv3Rs8>)



STEP 1: READ AN OPED

By reading and engaging with OpEds, you can help yourself and others make informed action about important community issues. In the OpEd that follows, Melina Fike, a leader of Berkeley, California’s Vote 16 Campaign and junior at Berkeley High School explains that the momentum of the #NeverAgain movement could spark engagement for young activists to lower the voting age in their states.

As you read the Melina’s persuasive essay, answer the following questions/prompts in the right margin labeled “Notes”:

- Identify one sentence or section that you thought was powerful or interesting.
- What topic did the author cover in the OpEd? How did they explain that the topic was important?
- What evidence did the author use to show that the problem was an issue in their community?
- What was the author’s “call to action”? What are they asking readers to do or think about after reading?

Optional: If you’d rather read an OpEd from your own community, here are some tips on finding one:

- Use this website to identify a local newspaper or online publication: <http://www.hometownnews.com/>
- If you have a specific topic you’re interested in reading more about, trying conducting a Google search with the following keywords:
 - “[YOUR CITY] + issue + oped” *Example: Providence + distance learning + oped*
 - “[YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER] + issue+ opinion”

The Voting Age Should Be Lowered to 16-Years-Old

By Melina Fike

March 16, 2019



During the media surge after the Parkland school shooting, various adults in my life felt the need to express to me their amazement about the young activists in Florida. The concept that a group of high school students could be so motivated and effective was clearly something they had never seen before. While I share in the celebration of these students' strength in response to this tragedy, I am not shocked by their eloquence.

As a 16-year-old who has witnessed the informed perspectives of my peers in Berkeley, California, I am more than aware of the raw power that comes from the ideas of students. The discussions that youth are having, both locally and nationally, are difficult to view if you're standing on the other side of this daunting gap between two generations.

Some of the adults in our lives who make decisions concerning school safety are the same ones who are shocked by the outspoken Parkland victims, who are now activists at the center of a national debate. These adults are the same people who make decisions on how to educate students on safety, whether it's about practicing safe sex, healing after a hate crime, or responding to someone bringing an assault weapon on your school's campus.

So why, to these adults, does the aftermath of this school shooting feel different? It's because the narratives of the Parkland victims are demanding attention, and this is something our country is not used to.

In Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, and Berkeley, four cities with liberal reputations and progressive voting right stances, teenagers are being listened to, perhaps more often than in other parts of the country. These cities let 16 and 17 year olds vote in local elections. In 2016, I joined a small group of politically frustrated high school students that decided to organize for a lower school board voting age in Berkeley. After seeing the high level of engagement so many youth in our city already had, we knew it was unacceptable for us not to have democratic influence on the decisions that affect not only the ways our public schools are run, but how we are kept safe at school.

The measure that we were able to pass, with approval from 70% of the city's voters, along with a handful of other citywide campaigns, is part of a growing nationwide movement to increase democracy by giving 16 and 17 year olds voting rights: Vote 16. A Vote 16 campaign relies on a committed group of teenagers to communicate their own ideas to a larger audience. It is important to do research, learn from other cities' progress, find adult

<p>resources, and above all, make sure it remains youth-led. The organization has a resource hub that can help you get started on the process, including talking points, data, and an action toolkit.</p> <p>Lowering the voting age in any election doesn't just promote civic engagement, but gives teenagers who are clearly paying attention the right to vote on matters that directly affect them. Seeing the responses from Florida teenagers, and other young people advocating for change in movements around the country, shows that youth deserve to be a part of these political discussions and decisions. This is a notion that advocates for Vote 16 always find most difficult to prove.</p> <p>Maybe the activism in Parkland will be the push we need to finally reform federal gun control legislation, or maybe it's just one force that will amplify the voices of young people across the country. Either way, our country continues to be patiently awaiting reform on all types of issues that affect youth, whether that be within a city charter or the Constitution.</p>	
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STEP 2: REFLECT:

After you read and respond to the questions in Step One, discuss the following questions:

Reflection Question	Your Response
<p>1. As you think about the OpEd that you just read, what do you think inspired the writer to choose this topic and include the elements that they did?</p>	
<p>2. 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?</p>	
<p>3. What is something exciting or positive about your community that you wish more people knew about?</p>	
<p>4. What is one problem in your community that you wish you could fix? How does</p>	

that problem affect people in your community?

STEP 3: IDENTIFY A TOPIC and TAKE ACTION

Speaking up and sharing your opinion with others can be a great way to help increase awareness of issues in your community and begin to come together to think about solutions. While OpEds are a great way to get your ideas across to people, your opinion does not have to be in an essay or OpEd format to have value!

A. Summarize the issue: If you were writing an **OpEd**, what would you write about? It's your turn to share your ideas! Use the sentence starters about to fill out your **OpEd Take Action Card**:

- In two or three sentences, explain your topic, why it is important to you, and how it affects your community. You can also add what you want people to do about the issue.
 - _____ (your issue) is important because...
 - One way this affects my community is...
 - It is important to address this issue because....
 - Optional: You can help address this issue by...

B. Post screenshot of your OpED Take Action Card on social media! Connect with friends, family members or people in your community to share this information about your topic and why it is important to you!

- Add #democracydoesntpause and tag @generationcitizen on Instagram or @gencitizen on Twitter so that we can see and elevate your ideas.
- Consider tagging your local newspapers.
- Include a call to action for your followers to retweet, repost, or think of their own ideas for OpEds.



OpEd Take Action Card

My Issue: _____

