**Rank Order Activity: Who is the Better Citizen?**

John Zola

1. (5 minutes) With groups at their school team tables, introduce the activity by asking for the “characteristics of a good citizen.” Post responses without much comment. After several replies, explain that this activity begins our thinking about citizenship and civics. It is also a chance to model an activity that we think is useful in promoting “civil discussion” in the classroom.

2. (8-10 minutes) Distribute the handout “Who is the Better Citizen?” Review directions. INDIVIDUALLY, rank these five individuals from the one (#1) who represents the best citizen to #5. Jot down one reason for your #1 and #5 choices.

3. (10 minutes for sharing) After individual rankings are complete, ask participants to join with a neighbor to share their overall rankings and then to compare their choices for #1 and #5. How similar or different are the choices? The reasons for the choices? What compelling cases can be made for the different choices?

4. (10 minutes) Shift to the large group for a sampling of responses re. rankings. One option is to have individuals “stand” for their first choice and generate a bit of sharing across the room.

 Focus the content de-brief on what were the characteristics that tended to “raise” an individual up in the list or move them down? What DO we mean by being a “better” citizen? In what ways might each individual in the list have “redeeming” qualities of citizenship? Introduce and refer participants to Westheimer/Kahne “kinds of citizens”. Article is in their packets. Quickly review “personally responsible citizen”, “participatory citizen”, and “justice-oriented citizen” and have them consider which of each of the characters in the activity manifest these different ways of being a citizen.

5. (10 minutes) Shift to a de-brief of the activity. What did you notice as a LEARNER in this activity…in doing the ranking and then sharing out with a partner and, ultimately, in the large group? (Anticipated/desired: a chance to make my own ranking, a chance to share ideas with someone else, a “safe” place for disagreement). We wanted to generate interest in the topic and create a place for civil discourse.

6. Explain the structure of a ranking activity…forced choices, no specific right or wrong answer, sufficient information/ambiguity to support a conversation about the rankings. Also…this was a very tiny example of “inquiring” into a civics-related topic. Compare this to a powerpoint on the characteristics of citizenship. More engaging, more chance for conversation, more chance to examine alternative notions of “good” citizenship.

7. Close with any final or other observations. Note that “Rank Order” structure can be found in the handbooks.

Student Handout

**Who is the better citizen?**

1. Guillermo currently attends California State University at Dominguez Hills where he is studying political science and hopes to go on to law school to become a civil rights lawyer advocating for the people of South Los Angeles where he grew up. Guillermo volunteers at a local food bank on a regular basis and is always ready to lend a hand to campus groups organizing for social change. Guillermo is undocumented and does not have a social security number.

2. Rosita was born in Malibu, California from parents who emigrated from Guatemala. Her academic career has been mediocre and she is “just getting by” at Malibu Community College. On the other hand, Rosita has always been a hard working and loyal employee at the various jobs she’s held since her first one as a hostess at age 14. The recent presidential election sparked a real passion for politics in Rosita. For much of 2012, she phone banked, walked precincts and became a trusted and important part of the local campaign operation. She wonders where this passion for the electoral process might take her in the future.

3. Jackson was born in White Memorial Hospital and lived his life in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles. He is the youngest of 5 brothers and his father died when he was three. Jackson joined a gang in high school, ended up committing various crimes and landed in prison at age 19. In prison, Jackson came to realize he’d made consistently “bad” choices and made a commitment to turn things around. He began taking classes and successfully pursued a GED and community college degree. Now out of prison, Jackson works hard and sometimes volunteers in a gang prevention program. A convicted felon, he is legally barred from voting.

4. Anita came up in a poor family that really was run by her elder sister. Never very into school, she and her family did spend every Sunday at church for almost the entire day, worshipping, praying, singing, and helping others. The help others part is what she liked the best. It made sense to her that if others have less or are in need, those who have, or who can help, do. It’s this sense of mission that led her to join the military after high school. Anita joined the Marines thinking that they were the smartest, toughest, and most hardcore branch of the service. After one tour in Iraq, Anita volunteered to be sent to Afghanistan where she was wounded and sent back stateside where she is now recuperating. Frustrated by what she saw in the military, Anita doesn’t see much of a reason to vote.

5. Tricia was born in Long Beach in a solidly middle class family. During college, she met her future husband. They were married right after graduation and worked for a few years at the Disney Company in their marketing department where she rose quickly. When she and her husband decided to begin a family she decided to take a leave of absence that turned into a full time parenting job. With three children, Tricia became the most active parent imaginable, serving on the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), volunteering as a room mom, and helping wherever she could. Tricia considers herself non-political and votes mostly when she “feels like it.”