

# Creating a Culture of Character *through* Service-Learning

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*The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart*  
*with*  
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## **Service-Learning**

*The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart*

by Marilyn Perlyn and illustrated by Amanda Perlyn

### **Components of Service-Learning are SMART:**

**Service project** that is structured within the school or home and has specific learning goals.

**Meaningful experience** that is measurable, evokes memorable moments, demonstrates moral values, meets the needs of the community, and monitors student progress.

**Academic component** linked to curriculum that supports learning from the experience

**Allows youth voices** to be heard

**Reflection** that allows children to think about what they did and how it made them feel; is shared through oral, written, or creative expression.

**Research** in which students inquire, identify, investigate, and learn about the community or global need that is being met.

**Take the learning experience** into the real world with the ability to use critical thinking skills to solve problems.

From The Center for Social and Emotional Education:

*Service-learning combines service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-discovery and the acquisition of essential values, skills, and knowledge content. Marian Wright Edelman, the founder of the Children's Defense Funds, famously said, "Service is the rent we pay for learning." And that message is at the core of any great educational effort.*

## SMART Examples

### *The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart*

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**SERVICE project:** collecting cans of food for The Food Train (a train of decorated boxes with canned food); learning goals are science, math, and art

**Meaningful experience:** collecting food for boxcars, donating to people in need, impact of the total number of cans donated; moral values are caring and citizenship

**Academic component:** nutritional value of foods, counting cans of food, fractions (percent of yellow vegetables to green ones), creatively decorating boxcars

**Allow youth voices to be heard:** students inquire about issues related to hunger, then identify a problem that they can help improve

**Reflection:** understanding that not everyone has food to eat, how important it is to provide food for those who are hungry, and the good feelings that come from helping others.

**Research:** need is that there are hungry people in the world and many in local community; research on effects of malnourishment, diet of homeless individuals, number of meals available at local soup kitchens, diseases from nutritional deficiencies

**Take the learning experience into the real world:** encourage family and friends to put cans of food in the mailbox when the postal workers have their annual food collection drive to help those people in the community who do not have food to eat

**SERVICE project:** Beautify Our School project; learning goals are science and English (writing skills)

**Meaningful activity:** write to local nurseries to donate trees to replace those lost during a hurricane; plant trees around the school; community impact of the number of trees planted; moral value is caring and responsibility (for environment)

**Academic component:** science lesson on which trees are most weather resistant and will do best in a particular region; how trees keep people alive by giving off oxygen; how trees recycle water, prevent soil erosion, and provide homes for animals and birds

**Allow youth voices to be heard:** students inquire about issues related to the environment, then identify a problem that they can help improve

**Reflection:** talk about how beautiful the school looks, how you have helped the environment, and how good it feels to have accomplished this goal

**Research:** need is that trees were lost in hurricane; investigate why trees are important to our environment

**Take the learning experience into the real world:** be aware of the environment both locally and globally; get involved in a program to protect the environment such as Roots and Shoots ([www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org))

# **Developing a Service-Learning Project: Ten Steps for Success**

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## **1. Identify a Need**

Help students identify a need through inquiry and investigation. Give students the opportunity to choose a local or global need. Some ways in which your students may do this are by listening to the news on television or radio, reading the newspaper, contacting the city council, calling religious leaders, or through class discussion. In addition, teacher may pose questions to students to engage them. Remember that your students are more likely to stick to their project if it involves an area of their interest and understanding.

## **2. Brainstorm for Ideas for Solutions**

It is empowering for children to see a problem, think of a solution, and realize the success of their own ideas. Giving them ownership by allowing them to brainstorm with ideas is very crucial to the self-esteem process. Try to help students identify projects in which kids can see that they are doing a good thing. For children it is not enough to be told that they are doing something good...they need the visual stimulation. Experiences that put kids in direct contact with the recipients of their efforts are experiences that allow children to directly touch a need. Students should choose a solution that they are capable of doing.

## **3. Plan the Project, Academic Component, and Reflective Process**

Children should research and investigate the issues related to the problem so that they fully understand how they can be of help. Develop a plan with your students for how they will meet the need that has been identified. Examples of the service project may involve offering a service, saving old towels for animal shelters, collecting old blankets or making quilts for the homeless, or creating a garden to feed the hungry. Once you have chosen your class project, you will need to plan for gathering of supplies, dates of activities, and the date that the project or event will take place. Plan how an academic lesson will be integrated with the project. Integrate this plan with your curriculum so that students benefit from the academic component of service-learning. Allow ample time for reflection. Reflection is the key to service-learning because it unites all of the aspects of the activity to allow children to understand what they have done, what they have learned, feel a glow in their hearts, and leaves them with a better understanding of what they can do to better their community (and world) and the people within it.

## **4. Create a Name, Logo, Stationery, and Business Cards**

Students should choose a creative name and logo for the project. Print stationery and business cards with the project logo, school's name, address, and phone number. Students may want to include the teacher's name and grade level of the class, as well. Both stationery and business cards help to give students ownership of their project. Additionally, they give a professional appearance to the project for potential donors.

## **5. Get a Letter of Support**

Be sure to ask for a letter of support from the organization that is the recipient of your students' efforts. Attach a copy of that letter whenever you are asking for support from businesses or individuals. This will help to introduce your students and their project. It will most importantly verify the recipient(s) of the donations.

## **6. Create a Press Release for the Day of Your Event**

Once the project is planned, have students write a press release describing the project, what they have learned, and how they contributed to making a difference. Include when and where the events or activity will take place. Fax it to the newspapers, radio, and television stations in your local area weeks in advance of your event date. Any coverage that the media provides will help to raise community awareness of your students' project and will additionally provide your students with an enormous sense of accomplishment. The day of execution is the most fun part! It is the culmination of your planning and is the day in which your class will share what they have done with others in the community or school. It is a day of great pride, wonderful feelings, and celebration of their accomplishments.

## **7. Take Photographs**

Students should take photos of their activities along the way. It is good to keep a memory album of photos, newspaper articles, and thank you notes. If people are in the photos, they must get their names and phone numbers for press releases. These pictures will be great to keep as memories and they should include them in the thank you notes that they write to contributors. People from the media usually like to take their own photos but they may choose to use a student's photo if the reporter was unable to be at their project event.

## **8. Write Thank You Notes to Contributors**

After the project event has taken place, students should write thank you notes to the major contributors, thanking them for their support and updating them on the final success of their contributions. Include photos when possible.

## **9. Keep Good Records**

Keep good notes of the entire project activity so that these records may be used as a blueprint for other years and for other projects. Many students need to keep track of their service hours, so keep an accurate dated record of hours that are volunteered.

## **10. Initially Limit the Scope of the Project**

Choose projects that are age appropriate. You want service-learning to add to students' lives, not consume them!

## SMART Service-Learning Format

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**Service project** - WHAT is the goal of project? WILL it benefit both the student and the recipient? WHAT are the specific learning goals?

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**Meaningful activity**- HOW will the goal be executed and accomplished? WHAT moral values will be demonstrated? WHAT will students remember?

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**Academic component** – DO the lessons learned support your curriculum? ARE **students' voices allowed to be heard**?

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**Reflection and Research** - WHY was this project important? WHO was helped? WHAT values were demonstrated and experienced? HOW will students express their thoughts and feelings?

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**Take into real world** – WHEN and WHERE will students use values and lessons learned? WILL the experience be repeated outside of the classroom?

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## **Academic Activities to Support Book**

*The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart*  
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**Writing:** Write a paragraph about a time when you helped someone in a special way. Describe how helping them made you feel. Share these stories with others by mailing or emailing them to The Heart of America Foundation for the Gee Whiz Kids award (see last page of book).

**English:** Vocabulary word list: wart, halo, menorah, Kwanzaa, hibiscus, ceramic, iguana

**Group activity:** Write a 2-stanza poem with an “ABAB” rhyme pattern about a holiday.

**History:** Write a short paragraph on Muhammad Ali and why he is a man of great character.

**Science/computer:** Research on the computer what an iguana is and what an iguana looks like. Answer the question with a short paragraph and draw a picture of an iguana.

**Math:** Study fractions while baking or discussing Amanda’s double chocolate chip cookie recipe (see recipe).

**Geography:** Research the state of Florida and why palm trees, iguanas, and hibiscus plants thrive in the warm climate.

**Art:** Explore various careers by having the children wear different hats as the children in the book do. Have students draw a picture of whom they would like to be when they grow up. Allow the students to proudly share their drawings with their peers. Pass around a garbage basket and have the students throw away their drawings (most students will be very upset). Follow by explaining that people “throw their life away” when they get involved with drugs or alcohol. Discuss what being responsible means.

**Music/Theater:** Have students learn the music from *The Biggest, Brightest Light of All* CD and music sheet. Students can link music and literature together by repeating the lyrics and having a better understanding of the words and what they mean. Students can perform the play (based on *The Biggest and Brightest Light* book) for students and community members and inspire others to make a difference. Both CD and play can be ordered at [www.lee-knight.com](http://www.lee-knight.com)

**Self-esteem and kindness:** Have the students sit in a circle and take turns having one student sit in the middle. Have each student say something kind to the selected student (similar to when the children planted a tree and each one said something special to Dr. Malko). Discuss the difference between comments and compliments.

**Service-learning project (co-operative team):** Decide on a community need that should be addressed such as collecting food for a shelter home. Have the students involve their family and friends to collect items for donation. Follow through using service-learning worksheet.

**Diversity and cultural awareness:** Research and discuss symbols of Christmas, Hannukah, and Kwanzaa. Invite clergy or family members to visit the classroom and to present real life examples for each celebration.

**The OCHO Project: Read for A Need:** Engage students in a program that has a three fold focus of character education, literacy, and service-learning. There are eighteen character traits that are directly linked to OCHO (Opportunities for Children to Help Others). The project is aimed at increasing literary skills while providing opportunities for students to have experiences in which they can identify with essential character traits. Free download is available at [www.biggestandbrightestlight.com](http://www.biggestandbrightestlight.com).

## **Amanda's Double Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe**

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**Activity:** Recipe copies can be handed out to students. Students can make the same cookies that Amanda made and give them to someone special. Ingredients can be mixed together at school and the cookie dough can be baked at school or at home. The study of fractions can be incorporated with this service activity. Emeril Lagasse says, "Cooking not only teaches us about food but it also reinforces the skills involved in math, reading and following directions, using tools, and working well as part of a team."

### **Ingredients:**

3/4 cup granulated sugar  
3/4 cup light brown sugar  
1 cup Crisco  
2 eggs  
2 1/4 cup flour  
1/2 tsp baking soda  
1 1/2 tsp baking powder  
1 tsp salt  
2 tsp vanilla  
1 cup chopped walnuts  
2 2/3 cups chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a large bowl mix granulated and brown sugars. Add Crisco and eggs and then beat till smooth. Add flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and vanilla and beat only to mix. Fold in nuts and chocolate chips. Place rounded tablespoons of cookie dough on a greased baking pan and flatten slightly with palm of hand. Bake on top rack of preheated oven for 12 minutes or till lightly browned. Let cool and then remove to wire rack. Makes about 35 to 40 cookies.

## **Fortune Cookie Messages**

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### **GOOD FORTUNE COMES TO THOSE WHO CARE**

Activity: Messages can be printed out and inserted into balloons that are blown up or can be placed in a Chinese take-out box. Students can also select one of these messages from a bulletin board and write an essay on or draw a picture depicting the message selected. Customized fortune cookies with these messages can be ordered at [www.goodfortunecookies.com](http://www.goodfortunecookies.com).

Read a book to someone who can't read.

Volunteer to help a friend, teacher, or relative.

Donate your saved pennies to a good cause.

Bake cookies for someone who needs cheering up.

Send a card to someone you care about.

Call someone who would be happy to hear from you.

Collect canned goods to give to the poor.

Make someone smile with a picture that you drew.

Put clothes you don't wear in a donation box.

Save your old toys for needy children.

Write a thank note to a giving person.

Gather old towels for an animal shelter.

Bring your old sneakers to a recycling center.

Recycle plastic bags by reusing them to help save the planet.

Give books that you don't read to a child who would enjoy reading them.

**Character Quotes: Words to Live By**  
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**Activity:** Choose a different quote to put on the blackboard each week or month. Discuss the meaning of the quote and how students might apply it to their own lives. Students can write a short paragraph or illustrate what the quote means to them. Class discussion may center on what value or character trait is portrayed.

**Quotes Rock!** Using clay, have each student create a large enough rock on which to write his or her chosen quote. When the clay hardens, students can place these rocks around school, in a community park, or in a rock garden.

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” *Winston Churchill*

"Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.” *Muhammad Ali*

“Never look down on anybody unless you are helping him up." *Jesse Jackson*

“You will discover that you have two hands. One is for helping yourself and the other is for helping others.” *Audrey Hepburn*

“A liar will not be believed, even when he speaks the truth." *Aesop*

“To know what is right and not to do it is the worst cowardice.” *Confucius*

“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” *Thomas Edison*

“Fair play is a jewel.” *Sir Walter Scott*

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." *President John F. Kennedy*

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” *Eleanor Roosevelt*

“What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight - it's the size of the fight in the dog.” *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

“Honesty is the best policy.” *Don Quixote*

“We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors ...but they all have to learn to live in the same box.” *Unknown*

“Well done is better than well said.” *Benjamin Franklin*

“I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.” *Maya Angelou*

“Courage is not defined by those who fought and did not fall, but by those who fought, fell and rose again.” *Unknown*

"Each of us can make a difference and all of us should try." *President John F. Kennedy*

“Shoot for the moon. If you miss, you will land on the stars.” *Unknown*

“You don’t have to be a president to make a difference. You just have to care and be involved.”  
*Senator Ted Kennedy*

“Only from the heart can you touch the sky.” *Rumi*

“Who you are speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you are saying.” *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**Student Reflection Form for Book**

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did this story make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Have you ever helped someone? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. If so, how did it make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Did Amanda's story make you want to help someone? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Would you like to be friends with someone like Amanda and why?

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## **Web Sites for Character Education and Service-Learning**

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[www.biggestandbrightestlight.com](http://www.biggestandbrightestlight.com) The Biggest and Brightest Light / The OCHO Project

[www.cep.org](http://www.cep.org) Character Education Partnership

[www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org) Center for Social and Emotional Education

[www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org) National Youth Leadership Council

[www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org) W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Learning in Deed)

[www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org) Jane Goodall Institute

[www.earthforce.org](http://www.earthforce.org) Earth Force

[www.ipsl.org](http://www.ipsl.org) International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership

[www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org) Education Commission of the States (National Center for Character and Citizenship)

[www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org) National Service-Learning Partnership

[www.servicelarning.org](http://www.servicelarning.org) National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

[www.abcdbooks.org](http://www.abcdbooks.org) Cathryn Berger Kaye- literature and service-learning

[www.charactereducation.com](http://www.charactereducation.com) character education resources

## References

*The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart*  
by Marilyn Perlyn and illustrated by Amanda Perlyn

*The Biggest and Brightest Light: A True Story of the Heart* by Marilyn Perlyn

*Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*  
by Dr. Michele Borba

*Parenting for Good* by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz

*Character Matters* by Dr. Thomas Lickona

*Developing Character in Students* by Dr. Philip F. Vincent

*Building Character Through Service Learning* by Kathy Winings

*Teaching Your Kids to Care* by Deborah Spaide

*Character Building Activities for Kids* by Darlene Mannix (grades 1-6)

*The Courage to Give* by Jackie Waldman

*Paper Clips* – a documentary movie on the Paper Clips Project and the Holocaust Study Group at Whitwell Middle School in Tennessee

*The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven Practical ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, and Social Action* by Cathryn Berger Kaye

*The Essential 55* by Ron Clark

*Kids Taking Action: Community Service Learning Projects, K-8* by Pamela Roberts

*Service-Learning: A Guide to Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Student Projects* by Sally Benson