

Social Science

Place and Environment

Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

Any Social Science study has the potential to break barriers, open new ways of thinking and reshape the future. We hope that you have time to go beyond the surface of this rich learning opportunity and develop your personal views about the relationships that exist between people and their environment.

We hope you will find your own voice and form your own opinion through honest reflection and be challenged to think about how other people perceive, represent, interpret and interact with your chosen topic.

1. Asking questions to identify a learning focus

Goal: Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

This stage marks the beginning of our social inquiry! This is the time for you to be a curious learner and ask questions about the world around you. Think about something that has had an impact on you by making you feel surprised, shocked or curious. You are a social sciences investigator asking WHY?

Tasks

- **Think** carefully about a problem or issue in your community.
- **Identify** the reasons a problem exists?
- A problem in the community is usually caused by something, think about what is that something?

Often these problems affect many areas of a community, rather than just one specific part. For example, a lack of affordable housing in your community affects potential buyers, homeowners who want to sell, the livelihood of real estate agents, the morale (mood) of people in the community, and businesses in the community. **Just one problem is present in a lot of different parts of a community!**

Think about

- A personal event or situation which posed a significant challenge to you, your family or community. Flooding, earthquakes, drug issues, mental health?
- How did different individuals respond to this challenge?
- How did you respond to the challenge (if that's appropriate)?

Task:

- **Find** someone or a group to talk about this significant community challenge.
- **Write** notes of anything which raised a strong feeling within you or caused you to lean forward into the conversation. You may be able to use this to drive your inquiry.

Think about

- What initial assumptions did you make? And how did this influence the way you responded?
- Are your assumptions positive or negative?
- What do you want to focus your inquiry on and find out more about?

Before you move on, develop a deeper understanding of what an assumption is, and the influence assumptions have over research.

When beginning your topic, develop a set of focusing questions to guide your inquiry. These should be effective questions that come from your previous conversations or personal questions you want answered. You could categorise these questions in a mind map, a wonderings page or in any way that can expand your research opportunities.

Your initial focusing questions are important as they will guide the rest of your inquiry.

2. Gather Background Information

In order to understand a current problem in your community, you must understand the background and history of that event to understand how it became a problem.

Think about

- What leads to the problem or challenge?
- Could it have been mitigated by stricter rules?
- Were there people involved who acted against the advice of others?
- Could it be avoided next time and what needs to be done to make sure it doesn't happen again?

Task

- **Learn** about the background and history of your inquiry.
- **Write** about how people participated individually and collectively in response to the community challenge?

The difference between recognising a problem and finding its root cause is like the difference between a doctor's treating the symptoms of a disease and actually curing the disease. Once a disease is understood well enough to cure, it is often also understood well enough to prevent or eliminate. Similarly, once you understand the root causes of a community problem, you may be able not only to solve it but to establish systems or policies that prevent its return.

Understanding the background of an idea or issue

- Shows connections between systems and links to current events
- Helps us find out information about an issue within our community, including its history.
- Is the backbone of a social inquiry approach!
- Making links between the topic and current issues that deal with similar problems or challenges will show you the personal and social significance of your topic and provide meaningful contexts to develop your understanding.

During this stage of your social inquiry, you will

- make discoveries,
- develop historical understandings
- form connections through patterns.

There are so many valuable links between the past and the present!
Experiment with a concept map to get a visual of these connections and to develop a deeper understanding of them.

Check what a concept map looks like!

3. Explore the beliefs, values and perspectives around the current issue

It is important to understand how your opinions, beliefs, and values affect the way you interpret the past, understand the present and predict the future outcomes for your community. Your beliefs and values are unique to you, your community or culture.

Task

- Gain some clarity on what a belief, value, and perspective are before you go any further!

At this point in the inquiry, you will be thinking deeper as you begin to understand how different people have different opinions on a current issue.

People will tell you a lot of different things about your social inquiry. It is up to you to sort through these perspectives and decide which are the most important and interesting to your investigation.

Tasks

- **Explore** different beliefs, values, and perspectives to provide some continuity between the past and the present.
- **Remember** that what one person values could be different from what another person values.
- **List** disagreements or difference. Why do they exist?
- **Discover** and categorise different beliefs, values, and perspectives so that you can begin to see the connections. How do these influence your social inquiry?

This will help you become a critical, creative thinker who will make an impact on their community!

4. Decision Making

You have a lot of information, what will you do with it?

What does it all mean?

The decisions you make will influence your upcoming social action!

Think about possible barriers and obstacles before they might rise-up in your social inquiry. Analysing community problems can also help you decide what resources you need to investigate and how to research and present your learning. The better equipped you are with the right resources, the greater your chances of success.

Having a plan of action is always better than taking a few random shots at the problem. If you know where you are going, you are more likely to get there.

Think and write notes about

- What responses (decisions and actions) do individuals or groups make in the community about your problem or challenge?
- How do people's values and perspectives influence their responses?
- What are the consequences of these responses?

Part of being an active member of a community is participating in society. This means

- Owning our choices and decision-making.
- Understand the ways people in positions of power in society make decisions, policies, and rules that influence the lives of others.
- Exploring the connections between the actions and decisions taken by individuals and groups.

Check the examples section on how to tackle your big decisions and begin to bring your social inquiry together.

5. Social Action

This is what your research so far has been building up to!

You have put a lot of hard work by asking questions, gathering data, conducting interviews, understanding different opinions and making big decisions. Now is the time to put your research into action.

Task

- Become active in your community by creating a social action based on your findings
- How can you use what you know to benefit your community in some way?
- Think about how yourself and others can approach this issue and make life a little easier for those in your community.

What is a realistic social action you could take? Just offering to help a community out is a huge help. It shows that you think deeper and care about the people that the problem affects.

As a social sciences investigator, you are now presenting your findings to the community so that you can make a positive difference. A community is always at the heart of social sciences, whether this is a local community, global community or online community. Social sciences are all about people and their place in the world! When a community exists, people are smarter, more

ambitious and productive. Your big ideas and valuable research don't mean as much without a community to bring them to life.

Remember that the difference you make doesn't have to be on a grand scale - even making a difference to one- or two people's lives is a positive outcome.

6. Presenting Your Social Inquiry

Congratulations! You have finished researching, data gathering and implementing social action as a social sciences investigator. Now you can show off everything you have learned from this experience and show your audience what this all means.

Think about the best way for you to present this information. This will be different for different people, so don't worry if your friend is presenting in a different way to you. It all depends on your ideas, resources, photos, materials, and more.

That is up to you! Be creative and think outside the square. What is the best way to get your learning across? This could depend on the content you have. One way of presenting does not fit all! Some possible ways to present your learning are...

- A website
- A PowerPoint presentation
- A documentary
- A poster
- A booklet
- Find out what others have done in the past