

Youth Nation

6th-8th grade students

DAY 1: *Introduction to Youth Nation*

STEP 1. Introduce Youth Nation (5-7 min)

- Tell the teachers what Youth Nation is, using this example: ***“Youth Nation is a website designed for kids like to get involved with their communities, which can be the classroom, the school, or even the city. Today, I am going to introduce Youth Nation and why it can be a fun and helpful way to teach lots of new topics and lessons.”***
- Explain how Youth Nation is focused on how students can make an impact on their community.
 - Youth Nation will hopefully give students ideas to make their classrooms, schools, and communities better places.
 - Let teachers know that Youth Nation is a resource primarily for the students and they should encourage students to provide feedback for what they liked and didn't like, so the site is better tailored for the students.
 - There are lots of different topics that have been written about, so ask students to choose from their favorites and write comments on the posts.
 - Show enthusiasm for the project and its potential.
- Youth Nation should be used to facilitate interactions in the classroom. Some ideas for how to use the website in class are:
 - Asking students to pick one article that they enjoyed and respond to it, and submit their response digitally and to the teacher if desired.
 - Having students write a “blog post” or article about something they are interested in, and how it relates to civic engagement.

- For example, if a child loves video games, ask them how playing video games could contribute to the greater community. Maybe through charity work? Gaming events to fundraise? There is much potential in this.
- Having students work in groups to make a presentation of the theme of the month, and submit it to Youth Nation to be featured on the front page.
- If possible, for students who are interested, they can start a club that meets during lunch or after-school to discuss submission ideas or ways they can use Youth Nation's suggestions to improve their school.
- The teacher's role in Youth Nation should be to first introduce the students to Youth Nation, facilitate discussion on what the kids can do with the website, encourage students to participate, and to follow up with students later about their experiences with the website.
 - Teachers can also offer suggestions through the "SUBMIT" feature on the website, regarding what they liked or did not like about Youth Nation, or how Youth Nation can better suit their classroom.
- Let teachers know that they are not bound by these ideas, and that if they have a different idea for how to use Youth Nation, they should follow their instinct and try it with their students.
 - If the teacher thinks their technique was beneficial to the students, they should contact Youth Nation with their idea so that Youth Nation can suggest the idea to other teachers as well.
 - Similarly, if an idea did not work out as well as they thought it would have, they should contact Youth Nation with a breakdown of what they did not like as much.

STEP 2. Introduce Definition: "Civic Engagement" (3-4 min)

- Introduce the definition:

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference, according to the American Democracy Project. Are there any ways you think your students can use these lessons to improve the classroom? What about improving the school?”

- Have the teachers generate different ideas (ideally at a roundtable) and discuss some of their class’s strengths.

STEP 3. Connect “Civic Engagement” to Youth Nation (3-5 min)

- Explain that Youth Nation is a forum for students to improve their social skills and become productive members of their community, thereby practicing civic engagement.
- Say, ***“Youth Nation is about students discovering causes that they are willing to fight for. We want to help them find their voice so they can speak out for what they believe in. Hopefully Youth Nation gives you ideas for what can be done in your classroom. Youth Nation is for grades 6, 7, and 8.”***
- Remind teachers that Youth Nation will be the most effective if students and teachers play an active role in participation.

STEP 4. Demonstration/Tour of the Website (if possible) (3-5 min)

- If possible, use a projector to load the website to show the teachers what the website looks like.
- Enter the URL “<http://www.secdlab.org/youthnation>” into the search bar and hit “ENTER.”
- Important features to point out are:

- “NEW POSTS” on the left-hand side, which is where students can find new articles published monthly.
 - “SUBMIT A POST” two buttons below “NEW POSTS” where students can submit topics they would like to see covered on the website.
 - HOW TO COMMENT: click an article and scroll to the bottom, there should be a white text box where students can answer the question(s) at the end of the article. Once finished, press “POST COMMENT.”
- Tell teachers to encourage students to use the website, through commenting or submitting. There are a wide variety of topics that could interest them, and if they don’t like any of the articles, they should suggest something they would like to see instead.