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# Lesson Plan: Mapping Your Universe - What is Community?

**Subject:** Social Studies, Civics, Life Skills

**Grade Level:** High School (Appropriate for a 17-year-old student)

**Time Allotment:** Approximately 3-4 hours, which can be split over several days.

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## Materials Needed:

- A large piece of paper (poster board or several sheets of paper taped together) or access to a digital canvas (like Canva, Miro, or even a slide presentation program).
  - Colored pens, pencils, or markers.
  - A journal or notebook for reflections.
  - Device with internet access for research and watching a video.
  - A camera (a phone camera is perfect) for the community walk activity.
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## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define "community" beyond a simple geographic location, identifying at least three different types of communities you belong to (e.g., geographic, interest-based, cultural, online).
  - Analyze your personal role and responsibilities within two different communities.
  - Create a detailed visual "Community Map" that illustrates your personal network of communities and the connections between them.
  - Evaluate the health of a chosen local community by identifying its key assets and challenges.
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## Lesson Activities

### Part 1: The Spark - What Do You Think Community Is? (30 minutes)

This first step is about exploring your initial thoughts before we dive deeper.

1. **Initial Brainstorm:** In your journal, take 5 minutes to write down every word or phrase that comes to mind when you hear the word "community." Don't filter yourself; just write.
  2. **Watch and Reflect:** Watch the TED-Ed video "What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness." While it's about relationships, it speaks directly to the core of why communities are important.  
*As you watch, consider this question in your journal: How do the video's conclusions about relationships relate to the idea of a strong community?*
  3. **Refine Your Definition:** Look back at your brainstorm list. Based on the video and your
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reflections, write a one-paragraph personal definition of "community." This is your starting point, and it's okay if it changes by the end of the lesson.

## Part 2: The Exploration - Communities Are Everywhere (45-60 minutes)

Communities aren't just the street you live on. Let's identify the different types you're a part of.

1. **Identify Your Communities:** In your journal, create three columns with the following headings:
  - **Geographic Communities:** (Your neighborhood, town, city, state)
  - **Interest-Based/Affinity Communities:** (Groups based on hobbies, sports, fandoms, online gaming groups, academic clubs, volunteer groups)
  - **Identity/Cultural Communities:** (Groups based on shared heritage, faith, family, or cultural background)
2. **Populate Your Lists:** Spend 15 minutes listing all the communities you can think of that you belong to under each category. Don't forget online spaces! A Discord server for a hobby is a community. Your extended family is a community.
3. **Analyze Your Role:** Choose one community from your "Interest-Based" list and one from your "Geographic" list. For each one, answer the following questions in your journal:
  - What do you *give* to this community? (e.g., your time, a skill, friendship, participation, creativity)
  - What do you *get* from this community? (e.g., a sense of belonging, new knowledge, support, fun)
  - What is one responsibility you have as a member of this community?

## Part 3: The Project - Create Your Community Map (90 minutes)

This is the central, creative part of the lesson. You will create a visual representation of your personal community ecosystem. The goal is to see how your different worlds connect.

### Instructions:

1. **Start with You:** Place yourself in the center of your large paper or digital canvas. You can use your name, a drawing, or a symbol that represents you.
2. **Map Your Primary Communities:** Around the center, draw large circles or shapes for your most important communities (e.g., "Family," "Homeschool Co-op," "Online Writing Group," "My Neighborhood"). Use the lists you made in Part 2.
3. **Add Sub-Communities:** Within or connected to these larger circles, add smaller ones. For example, inside "Family," you might have "Grandparents" or "Cousins." Connected to "Neighborhood," you might have "Local Library" or "Favorite Park."
4. **Draw the Connections:** This is the most important step! Use lines to connect your different communities.
  - Use a **solid line** for a strong, direct connection. (e.g., Your family and your neighborhood).
  - Use a **dotted line** for a weaker or indirect connection. (e.g., Your online gaming group and your local school, if a friend from one goes to the other).
  - **Label the lines!** Briefly explain the connection. For example, a line between "Family" and "Volunteer Group" could be labeled "Mom and I volunteer here together." A line between your "Online Writing Group" and "Local Library" could be labeled "I get book ideas here for my writing."
5. **Add Color and Detail:** Use color-coding, symbols, and small drawings to make the map visually interesting and meaningful. For example, you could color all your online communities blue and all your local ones green.

Your map should not just be a list; it should tell the story of how you move between your different worlds and how they influence each other.

#### **Part 4: The Field Study - Community Walk (30-45 minutes)**

Now, let's take this concept into the real world. Choose one geographic community from your map (like your neighborhood or a nearby town square) to observe.

1. **Go for a Walk:** Take a 20-30 minute walk through your chosen area. Your goal is to be an observer, like a sociologist or a journalist.
  2. **Document Your Findings:** Take pictures or jot down notes on the following:
    - **Community Assets:** What are the positive things you see? (e.g., a well-kept park, a public library, a community garden, people talking to each other, local businesses, public art). These are things that strengthen the community.
    - **Community Challenges:** What are the problems or areas for improvement you notice? (e.g., litter, lack of public seating, empty storefronts, roads without safe sidewalks). These are things that weaken a community.
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#### **Assessment & Reflection**

This final part is to synthesize everything you have learned and experienced.

1. **Analyze Your Map (Written Reflection):** Look at your completed Community Map. In your journal, write two to three paragraphs answering the following:
    - What surprised you most while making your map? Did you realize you were part of more communities than you thought?
    - Which community on your map do you feel the most connected to and why?
    - Identify one "bridge" on your map—a person or place that connects two otherwise separate communities. Why is that connection important?
  2. **Evaluate Your Community (Written Reflection):** Based on your Community Walk, write a paragraph answering:
    - Overall, do you think this is a strong community? Why or why not? Use the assets and challenges you observed as evidence.
    - If you could make one small change to improve this community, what would it be and why?
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#### **Going Further (Optional Extensions)**

- **Interview a Community Leader:** Interview a local librarian, small business owner, or community organizer. Ask them what they think makes the community strong and what challenges it faces.
  - **Community Contribution Plan:** Choose one challenge you identified on your walk and brainstorm a small, actionable project you could do to help address it (e.g., organizing a small cleanup day, writing to a local official about a needed crosswalk).
  - **Create a Digital Story:** Use the photos from your walk and a free video editing tool to create a short (1-2 minute) digital story about the assets and challenges of your local community.
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