

LESSON 2: Youth-Led Change: Case Studies in Generosity and Activism



TOTAL TIME:
60 minutes

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze at least three case studies of youth-led generosity or social change efforts across different global contexts.
- Identify the strategies, assets, and obstacles present in each case and evaluate what made the effort effective or limited.
- Draw at least two lessons from the case studies and apply them to their own emerging project idea.

Guiding Questions

- What conditions make youth-led change possible — and what makes it collapse?
- What's the difference between a youth who is used as a symbol of change and one who actually leads it?
- What can you take from these stories and apply directly to your own project?

Materials

- Case studies

Differentiation Strategies

For students who need more support:

- Provide sentence starters for the case analysis: "This effort was effective because..." / "A key obstacle was..."
- Allow students to work in pairs or triads for the full analysis before sharing.

For advanced learners:

- Ask students to write a comparative analysis: What do all three cases share? Where do their strategies diverge, and what explains that difference?
- Have students research and add a fourth case from their own community or cultural background, using the same analysis framework.

Extension

- Students create an original case study profile of a youth changemaker from their own community.
- Students produce a short advocacy piece inspired by a case study: a letter to a local official, an op-ed, or a social media campaign plan.

Where could this fit?

- ELA: Close reading of nonfiction; analyze narrative structure, evidence, and rhetorical choices in profile writing.
- Social Studies / Global Studies: Examine how youth movements have shaped change across different political, economic, and cultural contexts.
- Advisory / SEL: Use case studies as mirrors: what does each story reflect about students' own potential and constraints?
- After-school / At home: Share one case study with a family member and ask: Does anyone in our family or community do something like this? What would it take?



Introduction

- Open with this question: "When you hear the phrase 'youth changemaker,' who do you picture? Where are they from? What do they look like? Who's missing from that image?"
- Surface assumptions about who gets to be a changemaker; for example, the "TED Talk kid" or the well-resourced student with media coverage. Then name what's actually common in the GivingTuesday Spark model: young people in any context identifying an issue close to their heart, rallying friends and community, and executing action.
- Introduce the four analysis lenses for today's case studies:
 - Strategies: What did they actually do?
 - Assets: What did they have to work with — T's and other resources?
 - Obstacles: What was working against them — systems, skeptics, resources, time?
 - Lessons: What would you take from this and apply to your own project?



**10
minutes**

Direct Instruction

Model the analysis process using the case study below. Read it aloud, then work through each of the four lenses together.

Model Case Study: Mari Copeny ("Little Miss Flint")

At age 8, Mari Copeny wrote a letter to President Obama about the Flint water crisis. Her letter helped bring national attention to an environmental justice issue that had been largely ignored. Since then, she has raised millions of dollars for water filters and backpacks for Flint children, partnered with scientists on water testing initiatives, and built a youth activism platform. She started with a letter and a belief that her voice mattered.

Model analysis:

- Strategies: Direct letter-writing → media amplification → fundraising → systemic partnership
- Assets: Community proximity, Ties to faith and family networks, Talent for communication, eventual Treasure from donations
- Obstacles: Age, lack of financial resources, institutional resistance, systemic racism
- Lessons: Start where you are; proximity to the problem is an asset, not a liability; one act can unlock more.



**15
minutes**

Highlight for students: "Mari didn't wait until she had the 'right' resources. She used what she had — her voice, her community, and her proximity to the problem. That's the Spark model."

Guided Practice

- Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one of the four case studies:
 - E-Train: Kindness Bookmarks (U.S.A.)
 - Lesein Mutunkei: Trees4Goals (Kenya)
 - Esther Ogunbowale: The Generosity Corner (Nigeria)
 - Gavin Duenas: Bottles of Hope (Guam)
- Invite each group to analyze their case using the four lenses and prepare a 2-minute

summary. After all the groups present, facilitate a whole-class synthesis by posing these questions:

- What did they do?
- What did they have to work with — T's and other resources?
- What was working against them — systems, skeptics, resources, time?
- What would you take from this and apply to your own project?



15 minutes

Independent/Group Practice

- Share that students will do a project of their own later in the unit. Encourage them to continue to think about what they could learn from the case studies.
- Invite students to respond to the following prompt in writing:



15 minutes

Independent Reflection Prompt

1. Which case study resonated most with you, and why? Be specific about what aspect of their strategy, context, or approach connected with your own experience or goals.
2. What obstacle did a case study changemaker face that you also face or expect to face? What did they do about it, and what would you do?
3. Draw at least two lessons from today's case studies and apply them to your own emerging project idea. Be specific about how you'd adapt, not just borrow, what you saw.

- Invite 2–3 students to share before the reflection.

Reflection

- Ask, "All of today's changemakers started in a specific place, with specific problems, with whatever they had. What does that tell us about where meaningful change actually begins?"
- Ask, "What separates a young person who stays inspired by these stories from one who actually does something? What's the gap, and how do you close it?"
- Reinforce: "The Spark framework isn't asking you to be Mari or Xiuhtezcatl. It's asking you to be the person in your community who decides it's their turn to start."
- **Optional closing:** Each student names one lesson from today's cases they are committing to carry into their project.



5 minutes

Handouts

- Case studies

