

LESSON 3: Finding Your Cause: Values, Power, and Community Rootedness



TOTAL TIME:
60 minutes

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify a cause they care about and trace its connection to their own lived experience, community, and values.
- Analyze who holds power in relation to their chosen issue and how that shapes what change is possible.
- Draft a personal mission statement that articulates their cause, their approach, and the change they want to create.

Guiding Questions

- What's the difference between a cause that interests you and one that you're rooted in?
- Who has power over the issue you care about — and who doesn't? How does that shape what you can do?
- What does it mean to be accountable to a community, not just inspired by it?

Materials

- Cause Exploration worksheet

Differentiation Strategies

For students who need more support:

- Provide a guided cause exploration protocol with specific reflection questions.
- Allow students to identify a cause connected to a person they know, not just an abstract issue.

For advanced learners:

- Ask students to identify a tension within their cause: e.g., two communities affected by the same issue who want different solutions. How would they navigate that?
- Have students draft a preliminary stakeholder map identifying allies, partners, potential resisters, and those most affected.

Extension

- Students research two organizations working on their cause — one local, one global — and analyze how their approaches and theories of change compare.
- Students rally three classmates or friends to share what issue matters to them, drawing on the Spark principle that recruiting people you know is the most effective organizing strategy. They bring results to the next session as potential project collaborators.

Where could this fit?



- ELA: Personal narrative and argument: how do you write about a cause you're personally connected to without losing analytical rigor?
- Social Studies / Government: Power analysis; who makes decisions about this issue, and through what processes?
- Advisory/SEL: Values clarification; explore what students stand for at the intersection of personal experience and public life.
- After-school/At home: Ask a family member: What issue in our community do you wish someone would fix? Add their answer to your cause map.

Introduction

- Open with this prompt: "Think about an injustice or problem that makes you angry. Where does that feeling come from? Is it something you've experienced? Witnessed?"
- Explain the distinction between a cause that interests you and one you're rooted in. GivingTuesday Spark asks young people to start with what's close to their heart, because rootedness is what sustains commitment when things get hard.
- Name the risk: some students will be drawn to causes that feel impressive or socially rewarded rather than genuinely theirs. Today's work is about honesty and finding the cause that actually belongs to you.



10
minutes

Independent/Group Practice



15
minutes

- Introduce the cause selection framework. A strong cause for a student-led project should:
 - Connect to lived experience or community: you have proximity to the problem or the people it affects.
 - Have a local entry point: there is something you can do in your school, neighborhood, or community.
 - Be connected to your T's: you have at least one relevant asset.
 - Involve a specific population you are accountable to: not just people you want to help, but people whose input shapes your work.
 - Introduce basic power mapping: "Power is not evenly distributed around any issue. To create real change, you need to understand who controls resources, decisions, and narratives — and who doesn't."
- Walk through a sample issue, such as food access in the school district.
- Who holds power? (School board, food vendors, district administration.)
- Who is most affected? (Students, low-income families.)
- Where are the entry points for a student project?

Guided Practice



15
minutes

- Ask students to complete the Cause Exploration worksheet.
- After completing their responses, partners can share their work and elicit feedback.
- After pairs share, facilitate a brief whole-class discussion. Ask, "What surprised you about your partner's cause? What connections do you see across causes in this room?"

Independent Practice

- Invite students to draft a Personal Mission Statement. Encourage them to use this frame:
 - I am working on [cause] because [connection to lived experience or community].
 - I believe the change that needs to happen is [specific, concrete change].
 - My approach will use my [T's] to [action], in partnership with [community or allies].
 - I will know I'm making progress when [specific, observable indicator].
- Invite students to share their drafts with a partner for critique.



15
minutes

Reflection

- Ask, "What's the difference between a cause that you own and one that owns you? Which one lasts?"
- Ask, "If you were going to recruit one friend to join your project today, who would it be and what would you say?"
- Say, "Your cause doesn't have to be finished or perfect. It has to be real. The mission statement you drafted today is the beginning of something you'll spend the rest of this unit building."



5
minutes

Handouts

- Cause Exploration worksheet



Icons: SBTS; Flowicon; Gendis Studio; ARIPATUT
DASUKI, Selot Lo from the Noun Project



Cause Exploration Worksheet

Explore a potential cause to work towards by completing the following prompts.

The issue I keep coming back to is _____

_____.

My connection to this issue is _____

(personal experience, community connection, inherited concern, other).

The people most affected by this issue in my community are: _____

_____.

The people or institutions with the most power over this issue are _____

_____.

My most relevant T for this cause is: _____

because _____.

Three people I could ask to join this work are: _____

I can ask people to join this work by saying:

_____.