



The Futures Project

What Do We Want To Become?

Project Design Lab | 2020

Six community-focused projects that activate the creativity and agency of young people to envision, design, and lead the changes we need and want at this historic moment.



Community Engagement Lab | communityengagementlab.org/project-design-lab



PROJECT DESIGN LAB 2020 | Introduction

The world is on fire, seeking racial, environmental, and economic justice. Our systems of teaching and learning during the pandemic are in crisis. This is the time to support and inspire our young people to envision, design, and lead the changes we need and want.

Now more than ever, creative engagement—*making things together that we care about*—can play a vital role at the center of learning, whether remotely or in-person.

These project templates offer teachers joyful, engaging and relevant ways to bring everyone together to reflect on where we've been, and to take new steps to envision and co-create a better, more just future.

Think of these templates as entry points, launching pads, a jump-start in the planning process of creating an environment of healing, reconnecting and visioning in response to the challenges of the pandemic and racial, environmental and economic justice.

For teachers seeking support to customize and implement one of these projects, the Community Engagement Lab's **Project Design Lab** offers the opportunity to work with national leaders in creativity, project-based learning and community engagement, plus receive a partnership with a professional teaching artist to plan with your team at the Design Lab and help implement your project in your school and community.

The Design Lab will take place via ZOOM, in the fall of 2020. Graduate credits or continuing education credits are available.

To learn more and reserve your spot at the Project Design Lab, visit communityengagementlab.org/project-design-lab

These project designs are the work of a team of Vermont educators and teaching artists who believe in the power of creativity at the center of learning:

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Community Engagement Lab

1.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why do people act in mean ways—what must we overcome to live in fairness and justice?

DESCRIPTION

This project identifies what is working and what is not working inside ourselves and in society. A possible project title is “The Layers of the Onion Poetry Project.”

Together we will create powerful statements of gratitude, compassion and respect to help envision and activate the culture shift we need to achieve a just and equitable society.

Students will connect with community groups made up of First Responders, representatives of the Justice system, people who are incarcerated and people of all races, classes, and cultures and invite them to share poems through in-person, virtual, and/or pen-pal poetry exchanges.

Through poetry, students and community members will explore themes of self, identity and belief systems as they peel back the layers of who we are, how we see each other and why we sometimes make mean or hurtful choices.

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating event will be the display of the poems on large posters in public spaces throughout the community, creating a thought-provoking community-wide art installation, empowered by youth voice.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Informed and integrated thinking – Civic engagement – Self-direction – Clear and effective communication

LASTING IMPACT

Having invested in poetry as a means for sharing truths in community, this project could grow in many ways to bring more complex truths to public exchange.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Day 1-2: Creative introduction to project goals

Day 3-4: Activity to build content knowledge (can focus on anti-racist vocabulary)

Day 5-6: Engage with community partners through interviews, shared poetry, stories, and/or activities to answer the essential question (begin to “peel the onion” of imposed belief systems back)

Day 6-7: Build context for “Onion Poet Project” and begin to create poetry. The end products would result in publication and public readings.

Timelines are approximate, to be customized, and do not need to be consecutive days.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

Poems, recording devices (phones), paper/journals, large format copies.

Learn more about joining the **Project Design Lab** to receive a teaching artist partnership [here](#).



2.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What power can be released at a turning point?

DESCRIPTION

Students explore key turning points and adaptations during the past months of COVID-19 and society's awakening to racial justice to understand how our responses can lead to the positive transformation we want and need at this historic moment.

Students will map their journey over the past months with defining moments thought of as turning points. Working individually or in small groups, in school or at home, and using dramatic techniques such as puppetry, novel use of props, movement, and improvisation, students will develop dramatic vignettes (scenarios) that demonstrate their turning point transformations.

This project leads your community to become aware of how it has grown, or could grow, as a result of the challenges of the past months, and identifies actions that we can adopt to help each other during challenging times.

CULMINATING EVENT

A "community crawl" of different turning point stories, presented outdoors or in safely distanced indoor spaces around the community, followed by a *make-and-take* space for the community members to create and share their own artistic expressions of turning points they've recently experienced.

LASTING IMPACT

This student-community creative exchange could continue to grow, looking forward to the turning points they aspire to bring to life, and how they might do that.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Critical Thinking – Generating Ideas – Empathy – Tapping personal experience – Perseverance – Communication – Integrity.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Day 1-2: : Intro to project / exploration of feelings and key turning points during the pandemic

Day 3-4: Art making activities (masks, objects, puppets)

Day 5-6: Improvisation, acting, music

Day 7: Scenario creation

Day 8-9: Performance practice in classrooms and community settings / art refining

Day 10: Performance for community/ creation with community

Timelines are approximate, to be customized, and do not need to be consecutive days.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

Mask and puppet making supplies.

Learn more about joining the **Project Design Lab** to receive a teaching artist partnership [here](#).



3.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do I want my community to become and what is my role?

DESCRIPTION

By reflecting on their own values and strengths, and through remote or socially distanced interviews with community members who are working on social change issues, students will formulate and express a vision of how they can personally contribute to their school and community in the year ahead.

After interviewing community partners on current social issues—such as climate change, racial justice and equity, the pandemic or economic justice—students design creative portraits of the community partners, incorporating key words and phrases from the interviews with the partners' images. Students also create their own self-portrait of their "highest self," which incorporates words from their own values and strengths statements that express a vision of how they can contribute to their school and community in the year ahead.

This project leads students to reclaim agency in presenting their identity within the school community; to inspire and be inspired by community members who are working to make social change; and to strengthen a culture of engagement and empowerment in the school and community.

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating event is an outdoor "gallery walk" where the self-portraits and portraits of community partners are displayed around town—which could be on lamp post banners, oversized posters on sides of buildings, yard signs and in shop or home windows.

LASTING IMPACT

Just imagine how this bold public statement of people's aspirations could easily grow into a regular community project taking on different shared issues.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Self-assessing – Questioning – Taking on different roles – Collaborate effectively and respectfully – Generate ideas – Contribute to strengthening community life – Respect differing points of view

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Day 1 Project Overview
Day 2 Build relationships with community partners / interviews with community partners
Day 3-5 Creation of portraits
Day 6 Sharing with community partners
Day 7-8 Co-creation of installation plan
Day 9-10 Installation and culminating event

Timelines are approximate, to be customized, and do not need to be consecutive days.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

Drawing/painting supplies, weather resistant canvas or coated paper.

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Community Engagement Lab

4.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is the recipe for human connection?

DESCRIPTION

A Recipe for Connection brings young people and their community together to create a culture of care and nourishment—increasing empathy and strengthening our understanding and connection to each other through our shared experiences of food.

This project explores our connections to food through recipe-sharing, story-telling, harvesting, cooking, exploring the food knowledge of our elders, and creating space for our community to come together around food and gratitude in connection with those we don't usually meet.

Students will have opportunities to explore their own traditions connected with food while learning about the experiences and food traditions of others within their community, and of the indigenous people that have lived on these lands for centuries.

Activities include field trips to connect to the working landscape; sharing personal, family and community stories about food through student-led interviews; sharing of recipes—in school and at home—and documenting (filming) the process; creating “digital lunchboxes” in which students create and share short videos or digital presentations of a favorite family dish, with food storytelling; drawing food and creating invitation cards to send to community members to invite them to the outdoor food-truck style Friendsgiving; and creating a community book of ‘Recipes for a Good Life.’

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating activity will be a book of Recipes for Human Connection and a Friendsgiving.

LASTING IMPACT

Once established by this project, the celebration of bringing a wider community together around food could serve many different community purposes.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Creative and practical problem solving – Clear and effective communication – Self-direction – Responsible and informed citizenship.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

This project could easily be customized as a single-phase project to feature a select group of creative components listed below, or expanded into two parts.

If expanded into two parts, it could roll out something like this: **Part 1**, implemented in Sept/Oct, could include identifying community partners, gleaning activities, creating and completing recipes, sharing stories, cooking, documentation, etc. **Part 2**, implemented later in the year, could focus on interviews with elders, designing and creating the recipe-book, writing affirmations, building banners, lunchbox intervention, field trips, video creation.

Timelines are approximate, to be customized.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

Food, appropriate indoor and outdoor space, tools for cooking and eating together, utensils and materials for students to cook at home, basic art materials, tech tools.

Learn more about joining the **Project Design Lab** to receive a teaching artist partnership [here](#).



Community Engagement Lab

5.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What can school become?

DESCRIPTION

Students, teachers and community members will collaborate to develop a shared understanding of the power and privilege in schooling—these shared understandings will inform the development of a new ‘game’ of school.

The school will create and implement a large-scale collaborative strategy game, played on a larger-than-life-size movable game board that is the map of their town, representing where, during remote schooling, students found learning (whether indoors, outdoors or remotely), and the gameboard highlights of other important portals to learning.

Through interviews with peers, teachers, administrators and school board members, plus their community members, students will build their understanding of how power, privilege and position can influence school decisions.

Students will decide on various constituents to be represented in the game and gather information to assign properties and abilities to the game pieces, which can be puppet-like sculptures or costumed characters that reflect status similar to how chess pieces do.

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating event offers all community members an opportunity to play the game and further their own understandings of who determines (and leads) the learning of our young people.

LASTING IMPACT

This community game format can be used to investigate other important features of community life that young people want to learn about and contribute to changing.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Engage multiple Perspectives – Empathy – Explore different points of view – Connect imaginative and realistic thinking and role playing – Manage one’s contributions within a group collaborative process

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Day 1 Intro to project
- Day 2 Movement and theatre activities around power, privilege and positionality
- Day 3 Develop ideas for the arts creations and goals of game
- Day 4-6 Arts creations; game questions development; puppet manipulation
- Day 7 Develop rules and procedures of the game
- Day 8 Test & tweak game
- Day 9 Game day “in house”
- Day 10 GAME DAY: invite community

Timelines are approximate, to be customized, and do not need to be consecutive days.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

Durable cloth for game board; acrylic paint or cloth markers; puppet making supplies.

Learn more about joining the **Project Design Lab** to receive a teaching artist partnership [here](#).



6.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do we create community closeness in this time of distancing?

DESCRIPTION

The pandemic has changed the ways we interact with each other and work together toward a better future. This project gets young people and community members to reflect on their challenges and to start creating stronger new connections.

Students will collaborate on a public art work that expresses the challenges and opportunities of strengthening connections during this time of social distancing. Their creative work will live in school and/or at home.

Using a shared framework, each student will make an individual piece that contributes to a large, collective public art collage. After the student work is installed in the community by the teaching artist (and student/community helpers), community members will contribute their own responses to the student's art work. In this way, the project inspires a visual call and response between young people and community members.

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating event will be an interactive outdoor public artwork installation—a large scale collage or mural.

LASTING IMPACT

Many different kinds of creative follow-up could build on this kind of visual call and response between young people and their community.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Empathy – Agency – Self-reflection – Generative ideas – Critical thinking – Questioning – Combining and mixing – Synthesizing – Responsible and informed citizenship.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Day 1-2 Intro to project; reflection, visioning, and processing with students
- Day 3-4 Creative exploration of student expression through a variety of visual arts media
- Day 5-7 Planning and making individual student pieces
- Day 8-9 Installation of student collage or mural in the community
- Day 9 Culminating event: teaching artist facilitates a creative process with community members to creatively respond to and collaborate with the students' public art installation, creating a community response which is added to or installed alongside the student work.
- Day 10 Reflection with the students on their artmaking process and the community's response.

Timelines are approximate, to be customized, and do not need to be consecutive days.

RESOURCES / SUPPLIES LIST

An outdoor space for the public art installation; paint, wood, clay, fabric, brushes, dixie cups, primer and sealer, trash bags, tarps, painters tape, disposable gloves; video recording equipment (phone) or videographer/photographer to document the student/community call and response experience; student DJ or music to set the vibe.

Learn more about joining the **Project Design Lab** to receive a teaching artist partnership [here](#).

