



FACING THE FUTURE

SOUTH FLORIDA VS. CLIMATE CHANGE

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Curriculum Guide
Grades 6 - 8

Facing the Future | Teacher Guide Grades 6 - 8

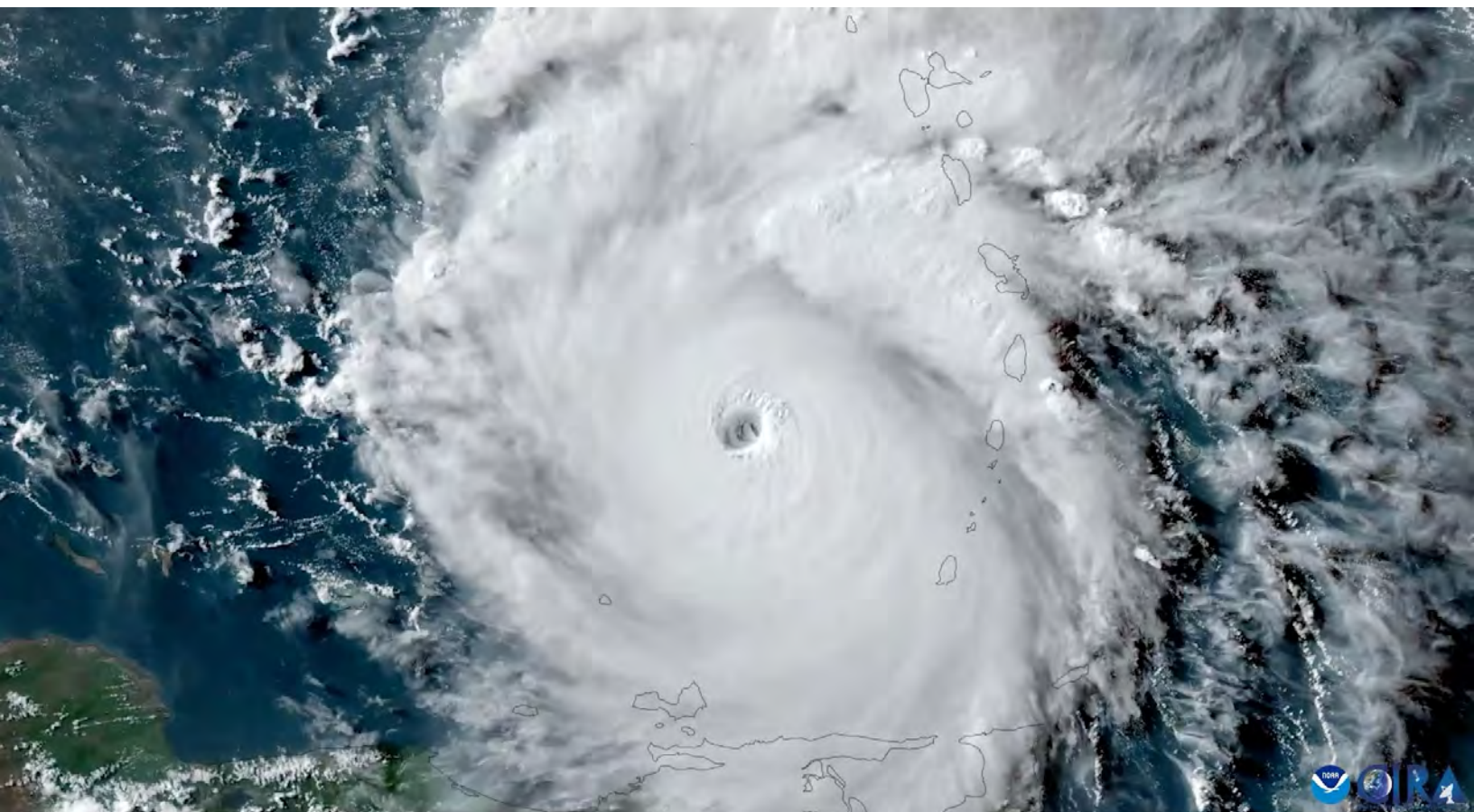
This curriculum guide gives students hands-on learning activities connected to the themes, current events, and interviews featured in the documentary **Facing the Future**.

Designed for grades **6–8** and aligned with Florida State Standards for Social Studies, Science, and Civics & Government, these activities let students explore important real-world issues while practicing skills for active civic engagement.

Activities include:

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| Lesson 1: | Citizen Responsibilities vs. Obligations: A Real World Example of Local Civic Meetings in Action |
| Lesson 2: | Middle School Agency: What Can I Do? |
| Lesson 3: | What's Your Number? Art on Higher Ground |
| Lesson 4: | Pledging for Change: Collective Action in Our Community |

This documentary and accompanying support materials are intended for use in a middle school setting and may contain material that could be sensitive for viewers who have experienced the impacts of rising seas firsthand.



Vocabulary List from Facing the Future

Adaptation	Changes or strategies a community makes to adjust to challenges, such as flooding or climate change.
Advocacy	Speaking up, taking action, or working to support a cause or solve a problem.
Civic Obligation	Actions citizens or officials are legally required to do, such as paying taxes or following laws.
Civic Responsibility	Actions citizens should take to help their community, like voting, attending meetings, or volunteering.
Common Good	What is beneficial for all or most of a community.
Community Resilience	The ability of a community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from challenges like natural disasters.
Data-Driven Decision	Making choices based on facts, measurements, or research rather than just opinions.
Elevation	The height of a location above sea level.
Media	A means of mass communication, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or the internet.
Mitigation	Actions taken to reduce the severity or impact of a problem, like building sea walls to prevent flooding.
Petition	A formal written document requesting a right or benefit from a person or group in authority.
Protest	To express a strong objection.
Public Meeting	A gathering of citizens, officials, or agencies where community issues are discussed and decisions may be made.
Public Policy	A system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic promoted by a governmental entity or its representatives.
Sea Level Rise	The increase in the average level of the oceans, often caused by climate change.
Stakeholder	A person or group that has an interest in a decision or issue, like residents, officials, or agencies.
State Government	Government whose powers, obligations, and responsibilities solely lie within the state boundaries.
Symbolism	Using objects, colors, or images in art to represent ideas, concepts, or messages.

South Florida Climate Leaders Featured in Facing the Future

Archbold Biological Station

Studies and protects rare ecosystems across nearly 20,000 acres in the Everglades region.

More: <https://www.archbold-station.org/>

The CLEO Institute

A nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to climate education, advocacy, and community engagement.

More: <https://cleoinstitute.org/>

The Cortada Foundation

Promotes climate awareness and action in South Florida through public art and community-driven projects.

More: <https://cortadafoundation.org/>

The Everglades Foundation

Works to restore and protect America's Everglades through science, advocacy, and education.

More: <https://www.evergladesfoundation.org/>

Florida Department of Environmental Protection – Resilient Florida Program

Provides planning grants and implements the Statewide Resilience Plan to help communities address climate risks through adaptation and mitigation.

More: <https://floridadep.gov/>

Miami Climate Resilience Committee

Advises the City Commission on climate policy, code updates, and waterfront resilience issues.

More: <https://www.miami.gov/My-Government/Boards-Committees/Climate-Resilience-Committee>

Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners

The 13 elected commissioners who govern and set policy for Miami-Dade County.

More: <https://www.miamidade.gov/global/government/commission/home.page>

Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science

A leading research institution focused on marine, atmospheric, and Earth sciences.

More: <https://www.earth.miami.edu/index.html>

Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact

A collaboration among Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, advance adaptation strategies, and strengthen climate resilience.

More: <https://southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/>

University of Miami Climate Resilience Institute

Advances interdisciplinary research, education, and partnerships to address climate impacts and environmental challenges.

More: <https://resilience.miami.edu/>

Wetland Ecosystems Research and Coastal Sustainability Lab at FIU

Focuses on wetland ecology and coastal sustainability, including urban coastal resilience.

More: <https://wetland.fiu.edu/>

Citizen Responsibilities vs. Obligations: A Real World Example of Local Civic Meetings in Action

Introduction

Civic responsibilities differ from civic obligations. While obligations are required by law, responsibilities are voluntary actions that support a healthy democracy. One important civic responsibility is attending public or civic meetings.

A real-world example is the Stillwright Point Neighborhood meeting, held in April 2024 and featured in Facing the Future (06:23–10:13 and 36:03–37:32). At this meeting, local residents, elected officials, and representatives from government agencies came together to discuss community concerns about rising water levels. This example provides insight into how local government functions and how citizens participate in decision-making.

In this lesson, explore how different community stakeholders engage in local government. Learn to distinguish between civic obligations and responsibilities and evaluate the roles, perspectives, and authority of participants in a public meeting.



Learning Objectives:

- Analyze media as a source of information.
- Distinguish between obligations (duties required by law) and responsibilities (voluntary actions) as they relate to citizenship. Responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, voting, attending civic meetings, petitioning the government, and running for office.
- Recognize the concept of the common good as a reason for fulfilling the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship.
- Evaluate the obligations and responsibilities of citizens as they relate to active participation in society and government.
- Use scenarios to assess specific obligations of citizens.

Citizen Responsibilities vs. Obligations: A Real World Example of Local Civic Meetings in Action

Activity Directions

Watch **Facing the Future**, focusing on the timecodes **06:23–10:13**. This segment highlights the Stillwright Point Neighborhood meeting, showing how local residents, elected officials, and government agency representatives come together to discuss community concerns.

As you watch, ask them to pay close attention to:

- **Who is present at the meeting and what roles they play**
- **The issues being discussed and how different stakeholders contribute their perspectives**
- **How civic responsibilities and obligations are demonstrated during the meeting**

Identify who was present at the meeting and describe each person's role. For example, consider the Stillwright Point residents, the Chief Resilience Officer for Monroe County, and the County Commissioners.

Expand the conversation using the following graphic organizer to discuss viewpoints, arguments, and civic responsibilities. Remember: obligations are required by law, while responsibilities are expected behaviors of good citizenship and are not legally required. Responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, voting, attending civic meetings, petitioning the government, and running for office. An elected official might be obligated to attend meetings as part of their duties under the bylaws. Finally, broaden the discussion on civic responsibilities and obligations using these guiding questions:

- **Why is public participation important in local government?**
- **What might happen if elected officials did not attend meetings?
What about community members?**

	Stillwright Point Resident	Chief Resilience Officer Monroe County	County Commissioners
What role do they play during the meeting?			
Are they fulfilling an obligation or exercising a responsibility?			
What is their main point of view related to the water on the streets in the Stillwright Point neighborhood?			
What evidence can be found in the media to support your answer?			

Assessment Strategy

Use the following answer key to the graphic organizer.

	Stillwright Point Resident	Chief Resilience Officer Monroe County	County Commissioners
What role do they play during the meeting?	<i>Community members/ property owners speaking during public comment</i>	<i>County official providing expert guidance and policy recommendations</i>	<i>Elected officials are responsible for voting and policy decisions</i>
Are they fulfilling an obligation or exercising a responsibility?	<i>Residents attending and speaking ☒ Civic responsibility</i>	<i>Chief Resilience Officer presenting information ☒ Professional duty tied to public service</i>	<i>Commissioners conducting official business ☒ Civic obligation</i>
What is their main point of view related to the water on the streets in the Stillwright Point neighborhood?	<i>Concerned about flooding, road elevation, costs, property access, and neighborhood impacts</i>	<i>Focused on long-term flood mitigation, infrastructure planning, data-driven solutions, and climate adaptation</i>	<i>Must balance community concerns, budget limitations, infrastructure needs, and long-term planning</i>
What evidence can be found in the media to support your answer?	<i>Residents voice concerns directly to commissioners and advocate for solutions affecting their homes.</i>	<i>Presents information and explains resilience strategies and infrastructure planning considerations.</i>	<i>Lead the meeting, listen to public comment, deliberate, and prepare to make decisions.</i>

Alignment to Florida's State Academic Standards for Social Studies and Civics & Government

SS.8.N.4.1: Explain that science is one of the processes that can be used to inform decision-making at the community, state, national, and international levels.

SS.7.CG.3.13: Explain government obligations to its citizens and the services provided at the local, state, and national levels.

SS.7.CG.2.2: Differentiate between obligations and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship and evaluate their impact on society.

SS.7.CG.2.10: Explain the process for citizens to address a state or local problem by researching public policy alternatives, identifying appropriate government agencies, and determining a course of action.

Middle School Agency: What Can I Do? | Activity

Introduction

Facing the Future highlights the impact of rising waters on neighborhoods in Southwest Florida, including flooded streets and damaged roads. Using this as a real-world example, students will explore how citizens—of any age—can address and help solve local problems.

Lesson Objectives:

- **Identify the appropriate level of government to resolve specific problems.**
- **Identify appropriate government agencies to address local or state problems.**
- **How civic responsibilities and obligations are demonstrated during the meeting**

Activity Directions

Watch Facing the Future as an Example of the Civic Process

Watch Facing the Future, observing the process of civic engagement—for example, a community activist learning about rising floodwaters, contacting local officials, and identifying mitigation solutions.

Identify a Local Issue

Identify a problem in the local community or school. Research potential solutions to address the issue. You might start with WLRN news archives at www.wlrn.org

Map Out the Civic Engagement Process

Consider who to contact regarding the issue, including local or state officials (<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>) or area organizations and activists (www.myflorida.com). The graphic organizer can guide this process.

Determine the Best Way to Reach Out

Once key contacts are selected, determine the most effective way to communicate. This step encourages critical thinking about civic engagement and explores practical strategies for participating in local decision-making.

- Local officials via online portals or email
- Community meetings with posted dates and times
- Writing letters or petitions
- Requesting personal or virtual meetings

Step 1

Identify a Challenge

After watching Facing the Future, learn about similar issues in your own community or school. You might consider local challenges related to flooding, infrastructure, or environmental concerns.

The challenge I see in my community is	What I see being done is

Step 2

Research Community Roles

Next, research some or all of the community roles below. Note, your location might not have all these positions, or you might have more. Complete the last two columns on the chart below with the name and contact information for these individuals. Use the “Ways to Reach Out and Promote Civic Engagement” sheet to decide how to connect.

Role	What They Do	Who is this in my community?	How can I reach this person?
Mayor	Elected leader of a city or town. Runs meetings, helps make decisions, and represents the community.		
Town/City Commissioner	Helps run the town, makes rules, manages the budget, approves land use, oversees services like police and fire, and hires important staff.		
School Board Member	An elected official who sets rules and policies for local schools and approves budgets for education		
Police Chief	Runs the police department, enforces laws, and keeps the community safe.		
Fire Chief	Leads the fire department and emergency services.		
Planner / Zoning Official	Helps decide how land can be used and where buildings can be built.		
City Clerk	Keeps official records, manages public documents, and helps organize city meetings		
State Representative	An elected official who represents the people of a specific district in the state legislature. They help make state laws, vote on bills, create and approve the state budget, and speak up for the needs and concerns of the people in their district.		
Public Works Director	Oversees roads, water, sanitation, and other city services.		

Alignment to Florida’s State Academic Standards for Social Studies and Civics & Government

SS.7.CG.2.10: Explain the process for citizens to address state or local problems by researching public policy alternatives, identifying appropriate agencies, and determining a course of action.

SC.8.N.4.1: Explain that science informs decision-making at community, state, national, and international levels.

SS.7.CG.3.13: Explain government obligations to citizens and services at local, state, and national levels.

What's Your Number? Art on Higher Ground | Activity

Introduction

Art can tell a story and inspire action. **Facing the Future** features Xavier Cortada, an artist and climate activist who engages the public on the topic of rising sea levels. Students explore elevation and its relationship to sea level rise and community resilience. After viewing selected clips, students research the elevation of their home or school and create artwork inspired by that number.

Lesson Objectives:

- **Define elevation and explain its relationship to sea level rise.**
- **Research and accurately identify the elevation of a specific location.**
- **Create an original artwork incorporating elevation data.**
- **Explain how art can influence public awareness and civic engagement.**

Activity Directions

Step 1: Watch Facing the Future Segments

Watch Facing the Future, paying close attention to how artist and climate activist Xavier Cortada draws attention to the effects of rising sea levels (12:55–15:52 and 43:58–47:58). Consider:

- Why does Xavier Cortada use numbers (elevation) in his artwork?
- How does connecting art to personal data make the issue more meaningful?
- Why might people respond differently to art than to charts or graphs?
- How does this project connect science to civic engagement?

Step 2: Research Elevation

Determine the elevation of a location (home or school) above sea level using free online tools or maps to find accurate measurements. This step makes a personal connection to the scientific concept of sea level rise. Explain what the number means, and whether it is considered low, moderate, or high elevation for your area.

Step 3: Create Art Inspired by Elevation

Using their elevation number as inspiration, design and create an artwork—drawing, painting, digital art, sculpture, or collage—that expresses its meaning. Consider how elevation affects daily life, the environment and community resilience.

Step 4: Inspire Civic-Minded Discussions

Find ways to display the artwork created. Consider:

- How could this art raise awareness in our community?
- Where could it be displayed?
- Could it be shared with local leaders or community members?
- How does art contribute to public dialogue?
- Now that we know the numbers, what is the community doing about it?

Alignment to Florida's State Academic Standards for Social Studies

SC.6.E.7.6: Differentiate between weather and climate.

SC.7.E.6.6: Identify human impact on Earth's systems.

VA.68.O.3.1: Create art that communicates personal ideas and experiences.

VA.68.R.2.1: Explain how art reflects culture or community.

VA.68.S.1.4: Use art-making to communicate socially relevant themes.

VA.68.S.3.2: Demonstrate awareness of art's potential to influence thought and action.

Assessment Strategy

Use the following answer key to the graphic organizer.

Category	4	3	2	1
Quality of Construction	The artwork shows considerable attention to construction.	The artwork shows attention to construction.	The artwork shows some attention to construction.	The artwork was put together sloppily. Items appear to be just "slapped on".
Attention to Theme	The student gives a reasonable explanation of how every item in the artwork is related to the theme of elevation numbers. For most items, the relationship is clear without explanation.	The student gives a reasonable explanation of how most items in the artwork are related to the theme of elevation numbers. For many of the items, the relationship is clear without explanation.	The student gives a fairly reasonable explanation of how most items in the collage are related to the theme of elevation numbers.	The student's explanations are weak and illustrate difficulty understanding how to relate items in the theme of elevation numbers.
Time and Effort	Class time was used wisely. Much time and effort went into the planning and design of the collage. It is clear the student worked at home as well as at school.	Class time was used wisely. Student could have put more time and effort at home.	Class time was not always used wisely, but student did do some additional work at home.	Class time was not used wisely and the student put in no additional effort.



Pledging for Change: Collective Action in Our Community | Activity

Lesson Introduction

In *Facing the Future*, local governments, citizens, and organizations collaborate to address rising sea levels in Southeast Florida. The documentary highlights the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact and its Climate Action Pledge as examples of collective action and civic engagement.

Apply this model to the local community by identifying an issue, creating a pledge with shared solutions, and designing a strategy to encourage participation.

Lesson Objectives:

- **Define civic engagement and collective action.**
- **Explain how pledges can unite communities around shared goals.**
- **Identify a local issue affecting their school or community.**
- **Develop a written pledge with clear goals and action steps.**
- **Create a plan to encourage participation and support.**

Activity Directions

Step 1: Watch Facing the Future

Watch *Facing the Future*, paying close attention to the annual conference and a shared community effort (48:00 - 54:06). Consider:

- How can communities work together to solve problems?
- What makes a pledge effective?
- How can students promote change in a school or community?

Step 2: Research an Environmental Issue

Discuss a local environmental issue at school or in the community. Decide on one area of focus.

Step 3: Analyze and elaborate on an example text

Look at the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Crisis Compact's "Climate Action Pledge," found at https://southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SEFL-Climate-Action-Pledge_FINAL.pdf as a text. Elaborate on the opening sentence, "Southeast Florida is considered one of the most vulnerable areas of the country to the consequences of global climate change," using techniques including examples, data and statistics, explanations, definitions, or personal anecdotes. The guide may help in the process.



Type of Elaboration	Example
Example - provide more specific information about the detail to illustrate the detail	
Definition - provide the meaning of an unfamiliar word or concept	
Statistics & Data - the numbers or data that support the details	
Facts - give specific information that can be proven	
Explanation - explain the detail by thinking about who, what, where, how, why	
Personal Anecdote - a short story that makes a point.	

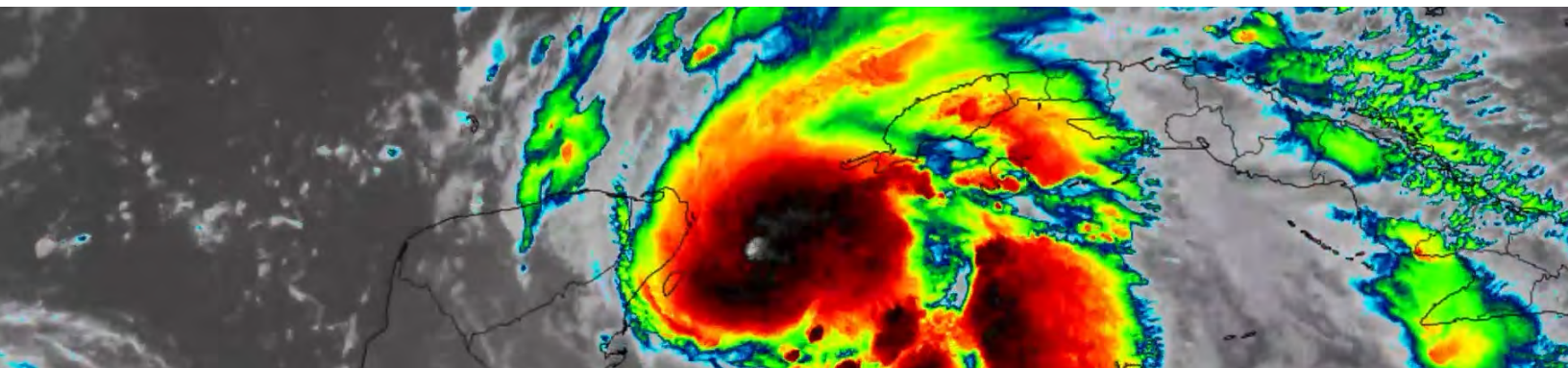
Step 4: Write a Pledge

Construct a similar pledge related to either the statement above or a similar local environmental issue. Each pledge should include:

- A clear statement of the issue (definitions)
- Why it matters (examples from varied sources, statistics and data, facts or personal anecdotes)
- Specific actions students agree to take
- A call for others to join

Template Example:

"We, of _____, recognize that _____ is a challenge in our community. [Insert Elaborative Techniques]. We pledge to _____ in order to create a safer/cleaner/stronger school. Together, we will _____."



Alignment to Florida's State Academic Standards for Social Studies

SS.6.E.3.1: Describe how government policies impact individuals and communities.

ELA.6.C.1.3: Write and support a claim using logical reasoning, relevant evidence from sources, elaboration, and a logical organizational structure with varied transitions.

ELA.7.C.1.4: Write expository texts to explain and analyze information from multiple sources, using relevant supporting details and a logical organizational pattern.

SS.7.CG.2.2: Explain citizen responsibilities at local, state, and federal levels.

SS.7.CD.2.3: Explain obligations of citizens in American democracy.

SS.7.CG.4.1: Explain how citizens influence government through civic engagement.

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Beginning
Clarity of Issue	Clearly identifies a specific, meaningful issue with strong explanation and supporting details.	Identifies a clear issue with some explanation.	Identifies an issue but explanation is vague or lacks detail.	Issue is unclear or not connected to school/ community
Understanding of Impact	Strongly explains why the issue matters and who is affected; shows deep understanding.	Explains why the issue matters and who is affected.	Mentions impact but the explanation is limited or unclear.	Little or no explanation of why the issue matters.
Action Steps in Pledge	Includes specific, realistic, and measurable actions students will take.	Includes clear actions students will take.	Actions are listed but lack clarity or realism.	Actions are missing or unrealistic.
Persuasive Language & Call to Action	Includes specific, realistic, and measurable actions students will take.	Includes clear actions students will take.	Actions are listed but lack clarity or realism.	Actions are missing or unrealistic.

