



Sport of the Month



aquatics

May

This month's theme: **taking action**

Goals:

- Recognize the role that Special Olympics plays within your community.
- Identify actions that support and encourage Special Olympics athletes and peers with special needs.
- Make and execute a plan that will positively impact the lives of Special Olympics athletes, coaches, and volunteers in their community and/or school.

Week 1:

Before beginning this lesson, you may want to review stories and videos about Eunice Kennedy Shriver on Special Olympics' website. You'll find links at <http://www.specialolympics.org/educators>.

Have students listen to the excerpt from Eunice Kennedy Shriver's remarks at the Opening Ceremonies for the 1987 Special Olympics World Games. Don't tell them who is speaking. Shriver says, *"You are the stars and the world is watching you. By your presence, you send a message to every village, every city, every nation. A message of hope. A message of victory. The right to play on any playing field? You have earned it. The right to study in any school? You have earned it. The right to hold a job? You have earned it. The right to be anyone's neighbor? You have earned it."*

Ask students what words they would use to describe the excerpt, how the speaker's words likely made the audience feel, and what the speaker's purpose may have been. Then ask if they know whose voice they are listening to, what event the words are from, or who the audience is. Share with students that the speaker is Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of Special Olympics. The excerpt was from her speech at the Opening Ceremonies from the 1987 Special Olympics World Games, and the audience was the Special Olympics athletes themselves.

To continue the discussion, tell students that at the Opening Games in 1968, the mayor of Chicago turned to Shriver after she declared the games open and said, "The world will never be the same." Ask your students, *What did he mean by this? What type of person sees the way things can be, rather than the way they are, and works to make things change?* Ask students for the names of others—both people who students know personally and famous people—who have displayed these same qualities. Ask your class, *What positive changes have these people created? How might the world be different had these people not made their vision a reality? Do you think you possess these same qualities? Why or why not?* Discuss this in class, then have students continue their reflections in their writing journals.

Aquatics in Special Olympics

Swimming is one of the most popular sports in the world. Unlike other sports, swimming is a life skill. People learn to swim both for safety and for sport. Swimming competitions include everything from short sprints to longer endurance events and relays. Special Olympics includes swimmers of all abilities, from strong, fast competitors to swimmers who are still learning.

How do Special Olympics activities impact students? Here's how one teacher answered:

"We were able to provide several leadership opportunities for students with and without disabilities. Each reached out to a different population of the school, which created a more lasting impact in our work toward a more unified school!"

—adapted from *Get Into It!*, grades 9–12



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Week 2:

Take Action!

- Share dates for Special Olympics events now and throughout the summer in your class newsletter. You can also feature information and links about Special Olympics and Project UNIFY so parents can learn more.

Challenge student groups to select one issue, problem, or challenge related to inclusion and tolerance in their community that they would like to change or affect in some way. Use the activity sheet “Creating Positive Change in Your Community” (available at the end of this newsletter or at <http://www.specialolympics.org/educators>), which asks students to justify the issue they’ve chosen, conduct research, determine how they can positively change/impact the problem, create a timeline, and implement a detailed action plan. The process is broken down into multiple steps.

Step 1: Select a Problem or Issue

- The first step is often the most difficult. Some groups won’t know where to start. Others will have difficulty agreeing. Challenge groups to select a problem that is authentic, that they can truly impact, and that is interesting and meaningful to them. Encourage them to write a problem statement that justifies their choice.

Step 2: Learn About the Issue

- This will be one of the most time-consuming steps and likely will require time outside of class to complete. Help students understand the benefit of learning as much as they can about their issue. Encourage students to interview other students with intellectual disabilities, community members, and other stakeholders.

Toward the end of class or as homework, have students reflect on the following in their writing journals: *Why did you choose this problem? Why is it meaningful to you? What influenced your group’s final decision? What will happen if no one addresses it? How can addressing it make a difference?*

As students work on their research, have them write their reflections on these questions as well: *How did you feel about the research process? What went well? What challenges did you face? What surprised you? What did you learn about your community? What did you learn about yourself? How can what you’ve learned help you?*

—adapted from *Get Into It!*, grades 9–12

May events:

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Week 3:

Allow students to continue their projects with the following steps.

Step 3: Identify a Solution

Help students assess several options to come up with the best solution. Benchmarks are included on the worksheet. You may want to have student groups share to assist the process. Examples of solutions include: (continued)



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Week 3: (continued)



Program Spotlight: Partners Clubs®

Partners Clubs are new school clubs that bring together high school students with Special Olympics athletes. These clubs are officially recognized by the school administration. The clubs team students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports training and competition. Members may also spend time together enjoying other social and recreational opportunities. To learn more about Partners Clubs, visit <http://www.specialolympics.org/educators> or contact your local Special Olympics office.

- a community campaign to end the use of the *R*-word
- a community work day during which community members are encouraged to work alongside people with intellectual disabilities to accomplish a task
- development of a buddy program in which children with intellectual disabilities are paired with an older teen
- Ability Awareness Day, during which those with intellectual disabilities share their strengths and talents with community members
- Elementary School Blitz, which features high school students speaking about tolerance at local elementary schools
- a club or team where high school athletes help coach children with intellectual disabilities
- fundraisers to support Special Olympics
- decorating community store windows or creating in-store displays to encourage tolerance

Step 4: Create a Plan

At this point students create their plan, make a timeline, and develop benchmarks for success. Encourage students to present their plans to another group to help them consider possible challenges and obstacles.

Toward the end of class or as homework, have students reflect on the following in their writing journals: *Why did you choose this solution? What impact do you think it will have? If you were to continue this project through next school year, what additional steps could you take? How will you measure the success of your plan?*

—adapted from *Get Into It!*, grades 9–12

Week 4:

Have students complete their projects with the following step.

Step 5: Implement the Plan

This too will be a time-consuming step in the process. Students will need ample time to complete their plan. Encourage them to assess the plan along the way and to make adjustments as needed.

Regardless of the specific outcome, the process of trying to change a community to make it more inclusive is something students should share and celebrate. Encourage students to measure their results both anecdotally and through quantitative data so they can chart their progress and build momentum.

Toward the end of class or as homework, have students reflect on the following in their writing journals: *How is your plan working? Is your group working well together? Does your plan need to be adjusted? Can anyone outside the group help you? What have you learned? What next steps would you like to take?*

—adapted from *Get Into It!*, grades 9–12



Creating Positive Change in Your Community

In this activity, you and your group will select a problem or issue in your community that you would like to positively impact, related to tolerance/inclusion for those with intellectual disabilities. The activity is broken down into several steps to help guide you along the way.

Step 1: Select a Problem or Issue

In this step, you and your group should identify a problem or issue in your community related to inclusion/tolerance for those with intellectual disabilities. Along with identifying the problem, you must also justify why you chose it as a problem or issue to change/impact. You may want to refer back to the community assessment you completed in Activity 2. Or you can conduct interviews with people who could help you select an issue. This may include your parents, neighbors, those with intellectual disabilities, family members of those with intellectual disabilities, government and community leaders, those working in related organizations, and teachers at your school. Since you are working as part of a group, it may be difficult to agree on one issue. Therefore, you may want to take some time to list all options and discuss the pros and cons of choosing each. Don't forget to listen to all group members and compromise when possible. The issue you choose should:

- Be important and meaningful to all group members.
- Be something that you can truly impact or change.
- Be an authentic need or problem in your community.

The issue/problem we have chosen is: _____

I know it is a problem because: _____

Step 2: Learn about the Issue

Knowledge is power! Now that you have selected the issue, spend time learning about it. You can learn from online or written resources, human resources (people), and community resources. Develop a list of questions and find the answers. This will help lead you to a solution. The research can include:

Creating Positive Change in Your Community

- What you already know.
- The history of your issue or problem, and what's already been done.
- The current situation.
- Interviews with potential stakeholders/collaborators.

Step 3: Identify a Solution

Here's where you begin to move from "what is" to "what can be!" First brainstorm several ideas for solving/impacting the problem with your group. Then evaluate how each idea will positively impact the problem, foster an environment of tolerance/inclusion, help those with intellectual disabilities, whether it is feasible, whether you have the resources and time to implement it, and whether you will enjoy doing so, etc.

Our solution is: _____

Step 4: Create a Plan

Now it's time to create a plan to implement your solution. Your plan should include the steps you will take, your timeline, who can help you, what you will need to implement your plan, what challenges you may encounter, how you will overcome them, and how you will know when you've reached success.

Step 5: Implement the Plan

Follow the steps and timeline you've developed. You will want to assess your plan along the way to make sure that you are moving toward your goals. Your plan may need to be adjusted as you implement it. Just make sure that all group members are aware of any changes.

Step 6: Demonstrate Outcomes and Celebrate Success

In what ways have you moved from "What Is?" to "What Can Be?" What specific progress can we identify along the path toward, "What Can Be?" What challenged you, and what can you learn from those challenges? How can you share your progress and strategies with others within and outside of your school?