The year is 2020. Omar has graduated from high school. He plans to go to college to become a teacher. However, he must wait. A new law requires that all young people allocate one year to community service after high school. Teens can help clean up parks, register voters, or build houses for the poor. Omar chooses to spend his year doing literacy tutoring in an after-school program, which will be good experience before he begins teaching.

Some people want to create a mandatory service program. John Edwards, who ran for president in 2008, gave a speech about this idea in May 2007. He said, “One of the things we ought to be thinking about is some level of mandatory service to our country, so that everybody in America, not just the poor kids who get sent to war, are serving this country.”

Some Americans dislike the notion of mandatory service because it limits individual freedom. They point out that a rigid requirement to spend time doing service could disrupt career or family plans. Some think that young people would get more out of going to college or entering a job-training program. In addition, some young people might need to earn money to help support their families. Others do support national service, but think that young people should be free to choose not to participate. For example, President Barack Obama wanted to develop national service programs. However, he believed participation should be voluntary.

People who do want youth service to be mandatory give several reasons. They say that mandatory youth service could be a tool for improving literacy rates and helping to protect the environment. It could help young people become better citizens, and some people predict that it would help reduce youth crime. People also point out that as young people plant trees or build homes, they would be learning valuable skills. Youth service might help them decide on a career or make contacts that could lead to a job.

We all enjoy freedoms and protections as Americans. Supporters suggest that it would only be fair to impose a requirement for each person to give back by serving the country. However, some say that our freedoms include the right not to serve. What do you think? Should you be required to serve your country after high school?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

**voluntary** *(adjective)* by one’s own choice; not forced

➡️ *Sample Sentence:* President Barack Obama wanted to develop national service programs; however, he believed participation should be voluntary.

💬 *Turn and Talk:* Should community service be a voluntary or mandatory part of school? Explain.

**literacy** *(noun)* the ability to read and write

➡️ *Sample Sentence:* Volunteers improve community literacy by teaching reading and writing in after-school programs.

💬 *Turn and Talk:* What part of literacy do you prefer: reading or writing? Explain.

**impose** *(verb)* to force somebody to accept

➡️ *Sample Sentence:* Imposing a requirement for each person to serve the country, supporters suggest, would only be fair.

💬 *Turn and Talk:* What consequence does your teacher impose for submitting late work?

**allocate** *(verb)* to set apart for a specific purpose; to distribute

➡️ *Sample Sentence:* A new law requires that all young people allocate one year to community service after high school.

💬 *Turn and Talk:* About how much time do you allocate to doing homework each night?

**rigid** *(adjective)* strict or unbending

➡️ *Sample Sentence:* They point out that a rigid requirement to spend time doing service could disrupt career or family plans.

💬 *Turn and Talk:* Would you describe your school dress code as flexible or rigid? Explain your answer.
**DO THE MATH**

**Option 1:** Some people think the government should *impose* a *rigid* service requirement on young people. But many young people already *allocate* time to *voluntary* service.

Fifty-five percent of youth ages 12–18 volunteer. Suppose that 10% of these volunteers are *literacy* volunteers (people who help others learn to read and write). What percentage of youth ages 12–18 would be *literacy* volunteers?

A. 5.5%  
B. 10%  
C. 5%  
D. .55%

**Option 2:** Youth perform *voluntary* service for many reasons. Sometimes, schools *impose* a service requirement. Many students argue that this kind of “*voluntary*” service isn’t *voluntary* at all! Some schools have *rigid* community service rules and require students to *allocate* a certain number of hours to service before they can graduate. Others require service as part of a class or a special project.

Yuriy is interested in how many students volunteer during school. He found the following statement online: “About 10.6 million youth, or 38% of the youth population, have performed service as part of a school activity.” If this statement is true, what is the total youth population?

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**Discussion Question:** Should schools *impose* service requirements on their students? Is it okay for a teacher to *allocate* a few hours of class time to service for a special reason, like reading with kids as part of a unit on *literacy*, or cleaning up a park during a unit on pollution? What about a *rigid* requirement for all students, like 100 hours of service before graduation? Is it wrong to make “volunteering” mandatory?
Students in Mr. Seemy’s class were talking about community service. The class was divided on the question of whether the government should impose a service requirement for all young people. Malik commented, “That seems kind of rigid to me. I think service should be voluntary.”

Halley responded, “I basically agree, but our school should allocate more time for volunteering. That way, students could really commit to projects. Right now I help at the library by tutoring little kids to build up their literacy skills, but I feel like I could do a better job if I could be there more.”

Mr. Seemy commented, “That’s great, Halley! Allocating more time for youth service could benefit our community as well as the volunteers.”

Halley questioned her teacher: “What are you talking about, Mr. Seemy? How can volunteering benefit the volunteers themselves?”

Mr. Seemy decided to share results from a survey conducted by DoSomething.org in 2012. “DoSomething.org is an organization that helps young people take action on things that they care about. They gave surveys on the relationship between happiness and voluntary service to over 4,000 young people, most of whom were in high school. Let me draw a graph for you on the whiteboard.”

Based on the data, what is the relationship between happiness and volunteering? Why do you think that is?

Why do you think some kinds of youth service correspond to higher levels of happiness than others? Do any of these differences surprise you?

How would you rate your own happiness? Can you think of a more accurate way to measure happiness?
DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

☐ The United States should impose a year of mandatory youth service.

B

☐ The United States should not impose a year of mandatory youth service.

☐ OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

☐ 

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

“Can you show me evidence in the text that...”

“I believe that...”

“You make a good point, but have you considered...”

“I agree with you, but...”
SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT IMPOSE A MANDATORY YEAR OF SERVICE?

TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

voluntary | literacy | impose | allocate | rigid