Should the government impose a mandatory year of service?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage introduces issues related to mandatory service. Here is some information that might be helpful to students less familiar with the topic.

Military Service

Young people join the military for many reasons. Some come from families who have served in the military, and they want to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and mothers. Some want to serve their country and take their turn as soldiers to protect all Americans. Some see it as a way to earn and save money, as they will be eligible for—or able to be covered under—the GI Bill. Money from the GI Bill will pay for many college expenses when soldiers finish their service. Some want to make careers as military leaders. When students graduate from high school, they can join the army, the navy, the air force, or the coast guard. In the past, when the United States has been at war, sometimes there has been mandatory—or required—military service. There is no mandatory military service at the present time.

Literacy

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Often, young people have difficulties reading from a very early age. There are many programs to help those who struggle with language, but literacy levels continue to be a problem in America. Students may drop out of school because they can't read or write well enough to succeed in their classes. When this happens, these young people have difficulty getting jobs and may resort to crime. Eighty-five percent of the people in prisons struggle with literacy. There are many community service opportunities in the field of literacy that can help others learn to read and write.

Community Service

Community service is a way to do volunteer work that will make the local neighborhoods and the world a better place to live. Community service can be work that helps young people, old people, poor people, sick people, animals, or the environment. Many high school students participate in community service as part of their graduation requirements. These kinds of activities help expose young people to the needs of others and the needs of the community. One goal of community service is to help everyone learn about the ways they can help each other and feel more a part of a community themselves.
### Should the government impose a mandatory year of service?

#### EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some may have this view:</th>
<th>But others may think:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Public</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some people believe that mandatory community service would be a very good idea. These young people could learn specific skills, appreciate the problems of others, learn more about their own interests, become more aware of their community and the environment, and generally help improve the health and wealth of others in their communities.</td>
<td>Some people believe that a year of service is too much to ask. They believe that since school is already mandatory, there should not be a further legal requirement when school is finished. They believe that, if community service is considered an important part of education, it should be a requirement before high school graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Graduates</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some high school graduates believe that service would bring them together in understanding each other and the different kinds of people and problems that exist in their area. Since many young people grow up surrounded only by people like themselves and their parents, they might not know much about the world around them. A year of service would give graduates the opportunity to be more knowledgeable about their environment and the cultures of others.</td>
<td>Some high school graduates have very specific plans. They may not want to spend an extra year doing something else that is required of them. They may want to go to college or join the military, or they might need to earn money to help their family. They want to have freedom of choice and believe it is their right as Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Leaders</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some community leaders would like to see young people participate in community issues. They believe that participation builds a stronger community because people become invested in the people and activities with which they are involved. Leaders believe they will pay more attention to the environmental, political, and economic decisions around them. They will generally feel more a part of the community.</td>
<td>Some community leaders are not interested in training young people and monitoring their work. They don’t want to deal with young people who don’t want to participate in the service they have been assigned. They believe it would be too difficult and expensive to arrange and enforce. They may feel this kind of program must allow young people to decide on community service by their own free will.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Additional Information

- In 2009, Congress designated September 11th as a National Day of Service and Remembrance and charged the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) with supporting this effort across the country. The CNCS works with numerous organizations to implement one of the largest days of charitable service in U.S. history.
- AmeriCorps, a U.S. federal government program encouraging public service work, was created under President Clinton and the National and Community Trust Act of 1993. More than 500,000 people have participated in AmeriCorps since its creation in 1993.
- 70% of adult welfare recipients have low literacy levels.
- Anyone with basic reading and writing skills, as well as time to commit, can become a literacy volunteer.
- Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) [www.serve.gov/sept11.asp](http://www.serve.gov/sept11.asp)
- Literacy Facts [https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts](https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts)
- Volunteering for Literacy [https://www.proliteracy.org/Get-Involved/Volunteer](https://www.proliteracy.org/Get-Involved/Volunteer)
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Annotations for Teachers

Features of Academic Text: Scenario to engage reader in controversy

The first paragraph in this article may cause confusion for students. It begins with a scenario that describes what the future might be like if there were a mandatory year of service. Students may see this as a factual scenario.

Many articles will begin with a scenario such as this to show what it might be like if a controversial law or plan was put into place in the future.

Ask students if they think this is an effective way to introduce a controversy.

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?
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GENERATING WORDS

Antonyms and Roots

Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of each other. Sometimes when we are learning new words, it is useful to think about the opposite word.

**voluntary**
Voluntary means to do something by your own choice. You volunteer to do something. In the United States, joining the military is voluntary. The root of voluntary is *vol*, which means free will.

**mandatory**
Mandatory means that the action is required either by the law of the land or perhaps by the rules of a school. In the United States, it is mandatory that you go to school. Maybe your parents have mandatory rules that you must follow about what time you go to bed. The root of mandatory is *manda*, which means to command.

Write a sentence describing something that is mandatory at your home or in your school.

__________________________________________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________________________________________  

Tell your partner about a voluntary activity that you do. Do you voluntarily help a younger sister or brother?

Can you think of antonyms for the words below? Remember: antonyms are words that mean the opposite.

- poverty (noun)
- wealth (noun)
- young (adjective)
- to like (verb)
- rigid (adjective)
- illiterate (adjective)
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DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

Survey Grid
The survey grid is a matrix you can use to poll one another on issues. You get to hear your classmates explain their thinking and use academic vocabulary, which may help you develop your own positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of student</th>
<th>Should schools impose a rigid service requirement on students? Why?</th>
<th>Should there be a law that requires young people to allocate one year to serving their country? Why?</th>
<th>What types of voluntary service would you like to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>Yes. Students just watch too many video games.</td>
<td>Yes. There are lots of things in the country that need fixing.</td>
<td>Cure sick animals and find homes for them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step One: Fill in each row on the survey grid by talking to one person at a time. Try to talk to as many people as possible so you can fill in all the empty rows. Jot down notes. If they use a focus word, write it down in the lined yellow box to the right.

Step Two: Count how many students say yes or no in the first two columns. Tally the most popular types of service from the third column.

Step Three: Write a sentence or two that explains what your survey showed. Here are a few sentence frames that you can use.

- The results of my survey show that ______.
- The majority of the responses to my survey show ______. The reasons people gave for this are ______.
- The results of my survey suggest that the majority of students are for/against ______. Reasons for this include ______.

Step Four: Report your findings to your classmates.

Focus Words Used:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________