Speaking Your Cause

**Grades** 5th and Up

**Objective** To identify a topic about which students feel strongly
Visual Art Option: express their opinion, and develop a call to action for others.
Performing Art Option: develop a vision for what they want to see changed, and dramatize their opinions in a scene or monologue

**Materials** Access to technology for online research
Visual Art Option: paper, magazine cutouts, scissors, glue, markers (or a digital collage medium such as Publisher)
Performing Art Option: paper, writing tools

**Background**

More and more in recent years, youth are engaging in forms of activism, taking a stand on issues about which they feel passionate. Youth have important perspectives that can be missed when highly-charged issues are discussed solely from an adult lens. This lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and identify issues they have strong feelings about, then to take those feelings and translate them into art and action, both for themselves and others.

**Lesson Procedure**

1.) Research/Brainstorm:
Using online resources or class discussions, ask students to think about issues in their school or community, or more widely in their state, nation, or the world. Generate a list of issues or causes together as a group. Briefly discuss the background and the perspectives on the issues as they arise.

*Possible examples:*
- Climate change
- Animal adoption
- Bullying
- Homelessness
- Gender equality

2.) Defining Terms:
**Activism** - A doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue. *Taking action to address something about which you feel strongly.*

**Call to Action** - Something such as a speech, piece of writing, or act that encourages people to take action about a problem. *Your direction or challenge to others to help address the issue.*
3.) Identify your cause:
Ask students to select one cause from the list about which they feel strongly.

**Guiding Questions:**
- Which topic are you interested in or curious about?
- Which topic do you have strong opinions or thoughts about?
- Which topic(s) do you have personal experience with?

4.) Visual Art Option Part One - The Mood Board:
Distribute visual art materials or introduce digital medium for collaging. Ask students to collect images that reflect the issue and how they feel about it, and then create a visual collage incorporating these elements.

**Guiding Questions: Search for/consider images that…**
- Show examples of the issue
- Represent how you feel about the issue
- Communicate abstract aspects of the issue (is there a color associated? shape? Think elements of visual art here)

Images from https://inclusivityzone.wordpress.com/2013/01/16/art-activism-social-justice/
4.) Part Two - Developing a Call to Action:
Ask students to identify a way in which others can engage or support their perspective on this issue. Turn this call to action into a sentence with a strong verb, and print it nicely to accompany the collage.

Possible examples:
- Climate change – Reduce/reuse/recycle more items
- Animal adoption – Adopt pets from Humane Society or rescues rather than pet stores
- Bullying – Spread more kindness to others

6.) Performing Art Option Part One
Using two sides of a piece of paper (or one side divided into two equal parts) ask students to fill one section with facts that are true about the issue in present day. In the other section, ask students to answer the prompt “If I had it my way…” and write what facts would be true in that case.

Possible examples:
- Climate change – Icebergs are melting into the ocean/the polar regions would remain intact
- Animal adoption – Puppy mill dogs live in inhumane conditions/all animals would live in safe and healthy environments
- Bullying – Students name-call others in the hallways/people would only use kind words.

7.) Performing Art Option Part Two
Invite students to write a monologue – a speech delivered to the audience by one person – addressing the current status of the issue, then conclude with a passage explaining “If I had it my way.”

Possible examples (only two sample sentences – full monologues are about 1 minute long):
- Climate change – Habitats for wildlife are disappearing at an alarming rate. If I had it my way, polar bears would have plenty of space to roam, play, and eat.
- Animal adoption – Animals in pet stores often come from puppy mills or mass operations that often do not have clean environments for the animals, and where mothers are producing litters solely for human profit. If I had it my way, all animals would live in healthy conditions with plenty of love and security.
- Bullying – Students in my school call each other hurtful names in the hallways. If I had it my way, people would only use kind words when speaking to others.

7.) Reflection:
- Ask students to share about their experience with a partner, then share back one thing with the whole group.
- Invite students to share what emotions they experienced during different aspects of the project – brainstorming/researching, collaging/outlining, developing Call to Action/writing.

Extensions
1.) Create a venue for students to display and talk about their work, or deliver their monologue to an audience – for example, invite another class to tour the projects and hear from the creators, or do this at a parent open house event.