Speaking Your Cause

Grades  K – 4
Objective  To identify a topic about which students feel strongly, express their opinion, and develop a call to action for others.
Materials  Access to technology for online research
paper, magazine cutouts, scissors, glue, markers (or a digital collage medium such as Publisher)

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:
   o Climate change
   o Animal adoption
   o Bullying

2.) Defining Terms:
   Activism - Taking action to address something about which you feel strongly.
   Call to Action - Something such as a speech, piece of writing, visual image or act that encourages people to take action about a problem.

3.) Identify your cause:
Ask students to select one cause from the list about which they feel strongly.

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

4.) 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/

5.) 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.) 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, developing Call to Action.

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