

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION



WeConnect

**A GLOBAL
YOUTH CITIZENSHIP
CURRICULUM**





WeConnect: A Global Youth Citizenship Curriculum

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A Global Youth Citizenship Curriculum

About WeConnect

WeConnect is a program model and curriculum designed to show youth that they are participants of a global society, inspiring a sense of understanding and confidence in relating and connecting to other people. WeConnect was developed with middle school-aged youth (grades 6-8 and ages 11-14) in mind but can be adapted to suit both younger and older age groups. The program model is designed for nonformal education settings like after-school programs or clubs. The curriculum includes a coordinated series of experiential and interactive exercises that prepare youth to thrive in culturally diverse settings—whether these settings are part of their school day, home life, social life, or workplace—by giving them the opportunity to learn and use culturally responsive skills and knowledge that stem from international education, which is one specific form of cultural education.

About Minnesota 4-H youth development

The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development is the only organization of its kind in Minnesota. By researching, training and delivering youth development programs, we help create positive, out-of-school time, nonformal learning opportunities for young people throughout Minnesota.

About the WeConnect partnership

Minnesota 4-H Youth Development created WeConnect with its partners Roseville Area Schools, Medtronic, Extension Diversity and Inclusion, National MultiCultural Institute, Minnesota 4-H Foundation, Association of Minnesota Counties, Bemidji Area Schools, and community members. Each partner was instrumental in various stages of building the WeConnect program model and curriculum.

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The youth development focus of this curriculum was inspired by **Dr. Dorothy McCargo Freeman**, associate dean of the Extension Center for Youth Development and state 4-H program leader. Freeman holds a Ph.D. in human development from Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech). She brings to her work more than 30 years of working with staff, volunteers, and young people. Her research interest is the social and emotional development of young people. Freeman has served in multiple leadership roles throughout her career, and in 2008 received the U.S. Air Force Recruiting Salutes Award, which recognizes individuals who have created a positive Extension image through leadership and citizenship as it relates to the development of the 4-H program. In 2010, Freeman received the National Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP) Distinguished Ruby Award, the most prestigious recognition presented by ESP, which recognizes a career of outstanding thinking, performance and leadership in Extension. Freeman has worked closely with the authors as they developed this WeConnect curriculum and helped garner funds to support it.

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ence to anyone interested in learning how to look at the world through a global lens. The Czechoslovakian native is a former refugee of post-World War II Europe. He began his career at the University of Minnesota in 1950 as an assistant to the international student adviser while studying political science. Mestenhauser has published more than 120 books, monographs, documents, articles, and chapters on numerous issues relating to international and global education. He mentored Skuza throughout her doctorate program at the University of Minnesota and led the International Institute at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, which she attended in 2001. Mestenhauser helped Skuza advance her thinking on culture and its relationship with youth development and education.

A professional work group crafted the early concept of this curriculum by combining their youth development, educational and cultural expertise, and by working collaboratively with community stakeholders. This group included **Jennifer Skuza, Jessica Russo, Ann Walter, Lynn Tchida, Nickyia Cogshell** and **Barb Soresen**.

As a contributor to an early draft of this curriculum, **Dr. Ghaffar Ali Hurtado**, a research fellow with the Extension Center for Family Development, helped shape the global citizenship focus of this curriculum. Since 2001, Hurtado has worked with diverse communities in Bolivia and the U.S. His interests are work, community, and family issues, especially within culturally diverse populations. His research approach includes qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, especially participatory rural appraisal.

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A Global Youth Citizenship Curriculum *(continued)*

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WeConnect Overview

Today's youth graduate into a world with fewer boundaries and greater opportunities for interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds and perspectives than ever before. It is projected that by the year 2050, the workforce will largely consist of individuals who traditionally have been underrepresented in the workplace, and the types of jobs available will require all workers to have cultural skills that allow them to move seamlessly from one context to another.¹ Future work environments and the skills needed on the job will demand high degrees of cultural understanding from members of the workforce.

The authors of this curriculum do not pretend to satisfy this great need for cultural education. However, we believe that WeConnect can be a part of the solution by playing a significant role in preparing youth early with a foundation for lifelong learning in culture, which may have a direct impact on communities, as well as workforce preparation. The learning environments found in youth programs have an advantage in delivering cultural education, as they can quickly adapt their way of working to better fit the changing circumstances, strengths, and needs of youth. These programs also offer ideal conditions for youth to explore culture through experiential methods in a relaxed environment where learning can take hold to become a part of their growth and development. WeConnect is for youth-serving organizations and schools that are interested in incorporating cultural education.

Curriculum adaptation

This curriculum contains a series of lessons organized into four phases of building cultural knowledge and skills.

Phase 1: Exploring

Phase 2: Stretching

Phase 3: Challenging

Phase 4: Connecting

While lessons can be adapted to meet youth needs, keep in mind that the curriculum is designed to meet specific learning objectives through highly experiential methods. Therefore, when adapting these activities, be careful not to move so far from the curriculum that key points are missed or underrepresented.

To adapt the curriculum for fewer sessions, we recommend choosing at least one lesson from each phase that captures the particular concepts you want your participants to learn. For instance, Lessons 2 and 3 from Phase 1 introduce youth to each other in a way that allows them to explore the nature of difference and human reaction to it. Lessons 9 and 10 from Phase 2 allow youth to evaluate their perceptions and assumptions. Lessons 14 and 15 from Phase 3 help youth understand how marginalization leads to oppression and how this affects the power and privilege of individuals and groups of people. Lessons 17 and 18 from Phase 4 provide a way for youth to think about how their actions impact others.

The concepts from this curriculum can also be used in conjunction with other content. For instance, young people in a photography or videography program can use what they are learning from WeConnect as inspiration for their creative work. Young people in a science program can explore how advances in science and technology are received/perceived in or affect different cultures across the world. Youth in any content-based program can apply WeConnect concepts to evaluate barriers to professions in that content field.

WeConnect Learning Objectives

Some of the language found in the learning objectives may be new to you and to the youth with whom you are working. This is OK, because the purpose of WeConnect is to stretch thinking and help youth see themselves and the world around them from different perspectives. The learning objectives include the following.

1. Youth will develop and refine their international thinking skills by

- Being able to shift their frames of reference in cultural contexts
- Challenging personal assumptions and internalizing more than one worldview
- Using critical analysis and comparative thought to form opinions about intercultural interactions
- Practicing reflection, suspension of judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, and mindfulness

2. Youth will demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively within an intercultural context by

- Expressing thoughts and ideas with clarity, purpose, and cultural awareness
- Using various forms of communication
- Gaining effective listening skills
- Recognizing the importance of language

3. Youth will possess a sense of self and exhibit social responsibility by

- Driving their own learning in ways that benefit the common good
- Understanding the impact of individual and collective action
- Cultivating cross-cultural leadership skills in preparation for success as members of the global workforce and community
- Articulating how the world is interconnected and how they are a part of it

Youth Development Framework/Middle School Youth

Youth development framework

Youth development is a holistic process of growth in which young people create a strong sense of self that enables them to be actively involved in the leadership of their own lives. During this process, youth learn to create good habits, work effectively with others, and act on behalf of the common good while cultivating their skills, knowledge, and interests in meaningful ways that serve as a basis for their growth.

Conditions that cultivate healthy development provide young people with opportunities to

- Feel physically and emotionally safe
- Experience belonging and ownership
- Develop self-worth
- Discover self
- Develop quality relationships with peers and adults
- Discuss conflicting values and form their own
- Feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery
- Expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible²

The youth development process found in this curriculum is intended to prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and carry this learning into adulthood. Through this coordinated, progressive series of lessons and experiences, youth strengthen their cultural, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities.

Middle school youth

“Middle schoolers are a perfect blend of child and adult. They can understand nuance and sarcasm, and still love to play tag.”

– **Mark Russo, middle school teacher**

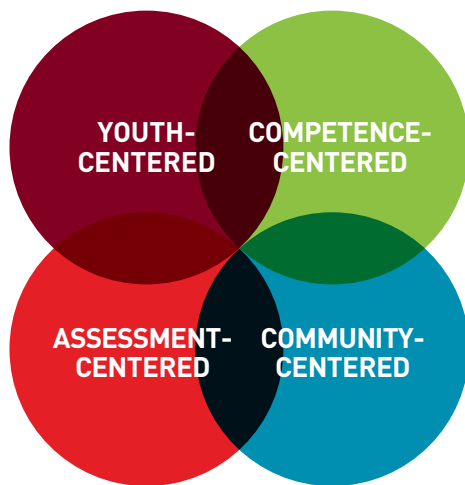
WeConnect was developed with middle school-aged youth (grades 6-8 and ages approximately 11-14) in mind, but can be adapted to suit both younger and older age groups. When building a learning environment with middle school youth, keep in mind their variety of developmental differences. It is not uncommon to see a short 80-pound, 12-year-old boy sitting next to a tall 11-year-old girl who looks like a teenager. This same child-like boy may have more social maturity than the older-looking girl. Middle school youth vary greatly in terms of emotional, physical, cognitive, and social developmental differences.

Middle school youth want organic and free-spirited learning experiences that cannot always come from a curriculum or program plan.³ These types of learning opportunities grow from the participants up rather than from the program down, and together youth and adults build the learning experience. These opportunities take on the energy of those involved and are shaped by personal interest.⁴ Pair this curriculum with the type of vibrant learning environment many middle school youth want, which is relational, energetic, interest and skill-based, and challenging, but not without adult guidance. Be present and help youth challenge themselves as intellectuals and young leaders. This will help ease the pressure some youth feel because of their self-consciousness or innate desire to question ideas, concepts, or authority.

WeConnect Program Model

The WeConnect program model is composed of four essential elements that comprise an organic learning environment. We use the word *organic* because it implies that a program is developed from the participants up rather than from the program down. Therefore, the program should be based on youth needs, assets, and interests, and youth should be invited to provide input into the program development process. Research shows that the most powerful learning environments found in youth programs are intentionally youth-centered, competence-centered, and assessment-centered, and occur in a context that reflects the community.⁵ While the curriculum provides the educational process and cultural content, the program model establishes the context in which youth will learn. This program model provides a solid foundation for young people to learn to be agents of change.

Figure 1.
WeConnect program model:
organic learning environment



Building a learning environment

Learning environments may exist anywhere and occur at anytime. Schools, recreation centers, campgrounds, after-school programs, coffee houses, faith-based centers, libraries, and parks are just a few settings that may provide environments conducive to learning.⁶ Wherever you build the learning environment, ensure that it is relaxed enough that youth feel comfortable sharing personal experiences and challenging their

own and others' thinking. Begin the educational experience by setting ground rules that are generated by the youth. Work with them to decide on and record ground rules, and then post them in a place where they can be seen in future sessions.

If the youth have a difficult time identifying ground rules, then make sure these are covered:

- Respect each person's viewpoint.
- Take turns speaking.
- Challenge yourself and others to think deeply.
- Share experiences.
- Give room for silence.
- Take responsibility for your own learning.
- Identify your own goals for this experience.
- Use time wisely.
- Have fun.

Make it centered on youth

Learning environments are effective when young people know that they matter and that they are central to all that happens in the program. Create your own checklist of concrete ways in which the environment can be youth-centered.

Sample checklist

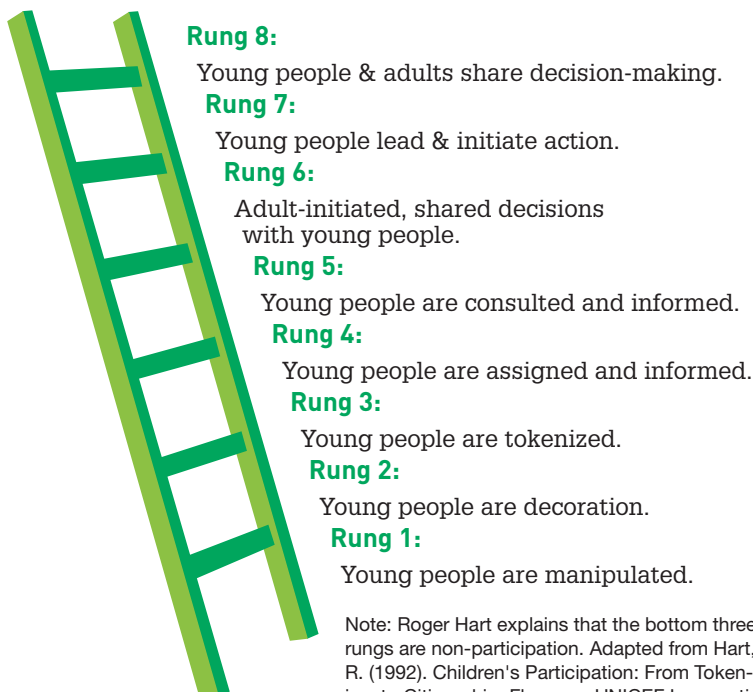
- Assess the needs and assets of the program with the youth participants.
- Build a learning environment based on the assessment results.
- Invite youth to lead the group reflection time.
- Involve youth in supplying program ideas.
- Invite youth to lead at least one part of every session.
- Personally greet each young person at every program session.
- Frequently use the young people's names.
- Get to know each youth and allow them to get to know you.
- Involve youth in program planning.
- Offer rewards for excellent work and ask youth to be in charge of recognition.
- Ask youth to assess the program (and then use their feedback to improve it).

WeConnect Program Model *(continued)*

Another way to build a youth-centered learning environment is to use the *Ladder of Youth Participation* developed by Roger Hart.⁷ It is commonly used to create a space for young people to partner with adults (see Figure 2). We believe that all people, no matter what their age, continue to learn and develop throughout their lives. The ladder illustrates how young people can increase their participation in the development of programs and projects, and how adults can work with and support them by sharing in the process of their learning.

Rungs 1-3 of the ladder describe young people's passive involvement. Rungs 4-8 portray genuine participation with increasing degrees of initiation by young people. For instance, some youth may be capable of initiating and leading a project. Others may be more interested in collaborating. Therefore, climbing the ladder is not the goal. It is more important to review how your program's design provides opportunities for young people to maximize their participation, regardless of the level. This allows the program to focus on youth needs and assets.

Figure 2.
Ladder of youth participation



Note: Roger Hart explains that the bottom three rungs are non-participation. Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Make it centered on competence

It feels good to be knowledgeable and to develop an interest into a talent. When someone is competent, it means that she possesses required skills, knowledge, qualifications, or capacities to do a task well. It also means that she continues to learn and develop. The cultural education in WeConnect is part of a journey that youth will take and is marked by knowledge and experience that grows over a lifetime.

WeConnect lessons are grouped into four phases. Notice that main objectives, skills, and vocabulary are highlighted at the beginning of each phase. Think of creative ways to communicate these main points so areas of competency become a focal point of learning.

Here are a few ideas for activities that facilitate competence:

- Present colorful laminated posters that illustrate main skills or vocabulary.
- Ask youth to develop their own learning goals and regularly check on their progress using discussion or journals.
- Ask youth to interpret the meaning of the main points through artistic expression.
- Incorporate the vocabulary into your everyday program facilitation.
- Help youth to advance their learning by asking them to integrate new concepts and ideas into what they already know.
- Frequently ask youth to write or talk about their new ideas or insights.

WeConnect Program Model *(continued)*

Make it centered on assessment

Using various assessment techniques and tools throughout the program is useful for identifying the progress youth make in their learning. The experiential learning process, which is embedded in each lesson, is designed to help youth reflect critically and apply new knowledge and skills. Taking time to discuss the learning experience with youth helps facilitate their ability to transfer their learning to other aspects of their lives. Using these assessment techniques brings new, relevant, and challenging learning to youth and helps them recognize when they excel and when they need improvement.

After completing the series of lessons, youth are asked to respond to a survey that will help gauge the impact of the whole experience. In this evaluation, youth will respond to statements and open-ended questions about their cultural learning and experiences before and after the program. This tool is designed to help facilitators see the change brought about by the curriculum and help youth reflect on their experience.

Make it reflective of community

Learning environments that occur in the community usually have an informal quality that gives youth an opportunity to relax enough to get into the learning without the anxiety that they sometimes experience in more formal places like schools. So, as much as possible, conduct your programs in community locations, or bring the community into the program.

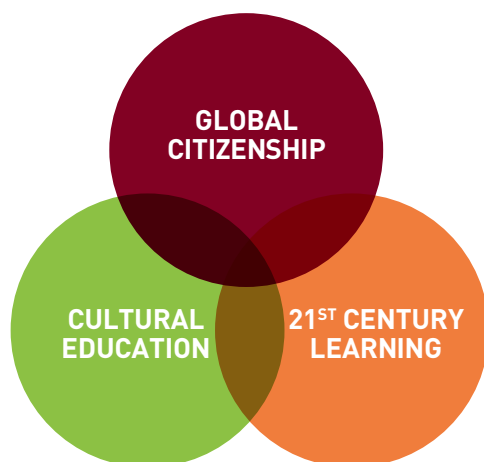
Here are some ideas for doing so:

- Invite community members to serve as guest speakers.
- Encourage youth to identify a special place in the community where they like to learn. This will reinforce their ability to be self-directed learners.
- Ask youth to draw pictures or graphically design their ideal learning space.
- Use flexible or unconventional seating arrangements.
- Organize walking field trips to museums, nature centers, picnic areas, gymnasiums, bookstores, or town halls.
- Incorporate cooperative learning methods and intentionally mix youth in ways that allow them to get to know new people.
- Invite parents, guardians, or other family members to the program.
- Ask youth to share their learning publicly; plan this event for a setting away from the program site.
- Build social networking into the program by using a safe, youth-oriented technology.
- Ask youth to explore their community through technology (e.g., Internet research, GPS/GIS community mapping, online maps).
- Ask youth to interview each other and one person in the community to learn about their life experiences.
- Incorporate volunteers and mentors into the program.
- Work with youth to identify a challenge the community is facing and create a plan for affecting change.

WeConnect Content Model

Three primary topics comprise the WeConnect content model: global citizenship, cultural education, and 21st century learning. This unique blend of content offers a fresh approach to how youth can build cultural knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them. The content also teaches endurance and offers a future-oriented direction to the type of learning youth will experience. This curriculum prepares youth to thrive in culturally diverse settings—whether these settings are part of their school day, home life, social life, or workplace—by giving them the opportunity to learn and use cultural education.

Figure 3.
WeConnect content model



Global citizenship

Global citizenship has been described as a continuum that ranges from being aware of the interdependent nature of our world, to understanding how local and global issues affect the lives of people around the world, to taking action to create a more equitable world.⁸ We see global citizenship as an outlook on life, a belief that we can make a difference, and a way of behaving that follows suit. The lessons in this curriculum will help guide youth beyond knowing that we are citizens of the globe to an acknowledgement of our responsibilities to each other and the world around us. They will help youth examine their everyday lives and move them to take action that leads toward positive change.

Cultural education

Cultural education is an important part of preparing youth to thrive in a global world. Today's youth have more opportunities for interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds and world views than previous generations have had. These opportunities might lead to ineffective communication and learning if youth are not equipped with the cultural abilities to bridge these differences and reap the tremendous value rooted in intercultural interactions.

One form of cultural education is international education. It is a particular approach to both teaching and learning in which thinking skills are at the core.⁹ International education helps us examine our assumptions and the ways in which we come to conclusions. It also attempts to inform our thinking by helping us see the world in all of its complexities. It helps us recognize that we are not always right and that the standards and values we use in our own life should not be imposed on others. Rather, we should seek understanding. It also helps us examine how we think so we can better understand our reactions when faced with different or opposing viewpoints.

The lessons in this curriculum will help youth explore what they know and discover what they do not know in order to come to a clearer understanding of themselves and each other and how this knowledge affects their interactions. The curriculum is designed to help youth explore self and culture in ways that knead the surface of the mind to get it ready to stretch thinking. These lessons will lead youth out of their comfort zones and challenge their ability to be both flexible and adaptable. Building cultural understanding is about learning how we connect to others. But it is also about building a deep, substantial, honest relationship with ourselves and the world. This curriculum is designed to help youth build practical skills for successful cultural interactions, allowing them to integrate these skills into everyday life.

WeConnect Content Model *(continued)*

21st century learning

What does it take to be an effective learner in the 21st century? It begins with critical thinking skills that are applied with a sense of global awareness, helping learners to be self-directed, curious, and creative. Effective 21st century learners also practice higher-order thinking skills, reflecting both innovation and sound reasoning abilities. Twenty-first century learners must be adept at different types of communication and be able to work cooperatively with diverse groups, while maintaining a sense of personal and social responsibility. Most importantly, 21st century learners need to understand how they learn. The learning environments found in youth programs can help youth identify interests and discover their motivation to learn, allowing the natural curiosity to drive their learning. Youth then bring this learning mindset wherever they go.¹⁰

As you use this curriculum, you will find 21st century learning skills embedded in the content and design of the activities. The curriculum will challenge youth to prepare for higher levels of learning with a future-oriented skill set that has relevance in young people's lives today and tomorrow.

PHASE 1

exploring

In this phase, youth explore what they know and discover what they do not know in order to come to a clearer understanding of themselves and each other and how this knowledge affects their interactions. Youth will explore their own and others' identities and will begin to explore general and specific cultural differences. This phase provides an opportunity for youth to ask questions and learn what questions others have.



Phase 1: Exploring

Youth will explore by

- Determining how identity relates to culture, revealing how diversity, identity, and culture relate to one another (Who am I? Who am I with you?)
- Gaining general and specific cultural knowledge and beginning to examine interdependence

Main skills

- Comparative thinking
- Reflective thinking
- Self-expression
- Suspension of judgment
- Open-mindedness

Main vocabulary

- Reflection
- Suspension of judgment
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Empathy
- Mindfulness
- Identity
- Diversity
- Culture
- Cultural identity
- Biography

Lesson 1: WeConnect

Purpose

For youth to share their reasons for participating in WeConnect, learn more about the program, and begin to explore some of the thinking skills the program hopes to strengthen and build (reflection, suspension of judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, mindfulness).

Time

30-45 minutes

Group size

8-30

Materials

- Puzzles (p. 69)
- Several thought-provoking pictures (photographs or drawings, at least 3 per person) that may depict the words/phrases from each puzzle*
- 1 blank paper for each puzzle
- Tape

Background

The purpose of WeConnect is to show youth how they are participants of a global society, inspiring a sense of understanding and confidence in relating and connecting to other people. WeConnect prepares youth to thrive in culturally diverse settings—whether these settings are part of the home life, social life, or workplace—by giving them the opportunity to learn and use culturally responsive skills and knowledge. In this first lesson, youth will be working with puzzles that describe some of these thinking skills (reflection, suspension of judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, and mindfulness) in order to come to an understanding of the kind of learning they will experience throughout WeConnect.

*We suggest the following website as a resource for pictures. Please use posted process for using copyrighted material:
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/visions-of-earth/>

Vocabulary

Reflection: giving something careful consideration or thinking about the meaning of something

Suspension of judgment: holding back on forming an opinion

Tolerance for ambiguity: being OK with uncertainty; not having to be in control; being comfortable in new situations

Empathy: being able to identify with and understand another's situation, feelings, and motives

Mindfulness: being aware and paying close attention to the surrounding world

Procedures

1. To set up the activity, cut the puzzle handouts (p. 69) into the number of pieces that best fits your group size. Scatter the pictures around the room. Pass out pieces from all the puzzles so that each person receives one or more pieces from the same puzzle or puzzles (for smaller group sizes, each puzzle group should have more than one puzzle to put together).
2. Ask them to find others who have pieces that connect to theirs.
3. Once in these puzzle groups, ask them to tape their puzzles to paper and then discuss the words and phrases on their puzzle to make sure that everyone understands what the main word or phrase means. Each person can then get up and look at the pictures scattered around the room. Ask them to select one or two pictures that look like a representation of their puzzle. Remind them that there is no right or wrong answer.
4. Give them a few minutes to look at and gather pictures and then ask them to meet with their puzzle group again. Together, they can choose one or two pictures, from the ones that each person chose, to share with the larger group.