CASES

WHAT TO DO? IT'S UP TO YOU

LEVELS: middle school and high school
SUBJECTS: social studies and economics
TIME: 30 minutes

Opportunity is an open-ended problem waiting to be solved.

Divide the class into small groups of five to eight students. Give each group one of the three open-ended problems listed below. Ask them to brainstorm ideas about what should be done. Encourage students to use their imaginations.

1. Every day on the way to school, Meryl passes a homeless man curled up in a storefront. Sometimes, he's asleep. When he's awake, he asks for money in a very gruff and unfriendly way. Meryl feels sorry for him, but her dad says that giving him money is no kindness because he just spends it on alcohol.

2. Kwesi and his sister study in the public library every afternoon after school until their mother comes by to pick them up after work at 5:00 p.m. They get their homework done, and when they get home, they can eat and watch television. One day, when they arrive at the library, they notice a sign that indicates that starting the following month the library will close at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Kwesi and Nyeta ask the librarian what has happened. He explains that there has been a reduction in the library budget. The chief librarian had to make a tough decision about how to cut back expenses, and she chose to reduce hours. The librarian adds that there have been a lot of complaints.

3. The whole neighborhood that surrounds the school is up in arms about the local convenience store. For high school students on their way home from school or practice, the store is a place where they can buy a soda or snack and hang out in the parking lot. For the young parents in the neighborhood, it's a place where they can get diapers or formula at 11:00 p.m. if they run out. For older neighbors, it's a place they can walk to when they can't get to the supermarket.

While there are a lot of neighbors who appreciate the convenience of the store, there is a group that wants it closed and has been quite vocal about their opinion. These neighbors complain about the noise and the graffiti that has appeared on the walls in the area, and now these neighbors have lodged official complaints that there are people dealing drugs in the parking lot.

After students have developed a list of possible solutions, have them choose one or two options and make a plan of action. For example, should Meryl give the homeless man money, ignore him, or is there an opportunity for something else? What can Kwesi and Nyeta do? Maybe they can get a pressure group of students together who use the library after school and negotiate with the chief librarian. What about the convenience store? Is there a role that high school students could play in maximizing the benefits to the neighborhood and minimizing the nuisances?

Case Notes