High-quality reflection challenges students to think deeply about their service-learning experiences. By encouraging multiple methods of reflection throughout the experience — before, during, and after — teachers can help students reach intended academic, civic and social outcomes.

Asking open-ended questions is one way to help young people process their service-learning experiences and move beyond the “feel good” results of the experience to cognitive gains. The questions listed on this handout encourage students to examine their preconceptions and assumptions, generate solutions to local and global problems, and determine roles that they can play in realizing these solutions.

Questions That Encourage Critical Thinking

• What did you see, hear, read, or notice on-site that surprised you?
• How were your observations similar or different from your pre-service assumptions?
• Did people react to your service in the way you expected? If not, what do you think accounts for the difference between your expectations and the reality?

Questions That Encourage Symbolic Thinking

• What object would be a symbol of your service-learning experience?
• Why would you choose this symbol?
• How does your participation in this service-learning project make you feel like a garden (or a book, a river, etc.)?
• How are parts of your experience like parts of the garden (book, river, etc.) and why?

Questions to Help Process Emotions

• What bothers you about the issue that you worked on?
• What do you think about the people or things involved?
• Are your thoughts about the issue facts or opinions?
• Why do you have the opinion that you do?
• How else can you view the issue?
• What other facts and opinions might be important to consider?
• How would your opinion of the issue change if viewed from another perspective?
Questions for Deeper Reflection

• What does this service-learning project mean to you?
• What do you think this service-learning project means to other people your age?
• Why should people your age be concerned with the issues that arise from this project?
• What does this service-learning project mean to your community?
• How do the ideas that arise from this service-learning project affect both your community and other communities?
• What does this service-learning project mean to your country?