Police Officer’s 101
(adapted from Violence-prevention Outcomes in Civic Education)

Overview
Students will learn about the responsibilities of police officers and consider what characteristics are required to be an effective police officer by participating in role plays and interacting with a visiting officer of the law. This activity will enable students to explore and dispel stereotypes about police, as well as learn appropriate ways to deal with conflict, advocate for their rights, and be responsible citizens.

Grade
8

North Carolina Essential Standards for 8th Grade Social Studies
• 8.C&G.1.1 - Summarize democratic ideals expressed in local, state, and national government (e.g. limited government, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, republicanism, federalism and individual rights).
• 8.C&G.1.4 - Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States.

Essential Questions
• What legal rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and its amendments, and how do those rights apply to citizens?
• How do local law enforcement professionals interpret and apply the law in fast-paced, potentially dangerous situations?

Materials
• Police Call Scenarios
• Police officer(s) or SRO (s) to serve as a resource person during the lesson
  o Contact a Police Officer, SRO, etc. 2-4 weeks in advance of this lesson to explain the activity and to ask for assistance in coaching students who will play police officers in role plays and offer expertise on legal issues during the debriefing (it is important this person does not come to give a “speech”, but rather is prepared to engage with the students as they work on, present, and afterwards discuss the role plays). After making an initial contact, follow up with an e-mail including the date, time, location, parking arrangements, school procedures for guests, and a complete set of materials for the activity. It is highly recommended to invite a resource person with legal knowledge to your classroom when doing this activity, not only provide valued assistance, but also to give your students a chance to interact with and learn from a law officer.

Duration
60-90 minutes

Procedure
What are the Characteristics of an Effective Police Officer?
1. Warm Up: Ask students, “What characteristics does an effective police officer have?” Allow time for students to brainstorm and jot down responses. Then lead a class discussion, posting all student responses on chart paper at the front of the room. After student thought has waned, provide each student with three
stickers and invite them to come to the chart paper (in small groups) and to vote on which three characteristics they feel are most important by placing their sticker by that word/phrase. (Students can also use all of their stickers to vote for one particular characteristic if they feel very strongly about it.) Once all students have voted, note which were voted as most important overall and tell students you will come back to this list later in the lesson.

2. Explain to students that they will be exploring the role of police officers and/or SRO’s in their community, as well as the characteristics that make an effective officer, by participating in an acting activity. Introduce the police officer(s) to the class and allow him/her to respond to the list of characteristics of a good police officer and if desired, to share a little bit about himself/herself. (Note: The officer should not be expected to do an extensive introduction here and should speak for no longer than 5 minutes; his/her main work with be interacting with students throughout the lesson.)

*Preparing Role Plays & Police Training 101*

3. Organize students into groups, ideally of six or seven (you can adjust group size and rolls according to your number of participants). Explain to students that their group will receive a scenario that they must act out. In it, something occurs that leads someone in the scene to call the police. As you hand out the scenarios, select two students from each group to play the role of police officers and further explain:
   - Group members who are playing citizens/community members (everyone not assigned the role of an officer) will work to stage the scenario presented to you. Be as detailed and realistic as possible in how you present the scene.
   - Students who are playing officers for each scene will receive a copy of the same scenario, but will not take part in creating the scene with the rest of their group. Instead, students from all groups assigned the roll of police will work with the visiting police officer(s) in the hall for “police training 101.” The officer will explain basic police procedure, and help prepare the student officers on how to spontaneously deal with the scenario presented to them. (Students will have a basic idea of what to expect from the copy of the scenario provided; however, they will not know how the group has decided to stage the scene, so some of their work will be improvisation.)

4. Allow for around 10 minutes for scene development/police training.

5. Once all groups are prepared, review your expectations for being a respectful audience member and participant. Hand out the attached response worksheet and instruct students to take notes as they watch each scene. Explain that each group will present their scenario. When the “Caller” line is spoken, the two student police officers will enter the scene and try to resolve the situation. At this point, all students must improvise their responses. Remind students that the goal is not to be humorous; the goal is to try and play their parts in a realistic fashion.

6. Once the student police have entered the scene and are acting out their response to the call, the visiting officer can call “Freeze” at any time to stop the scene and provide feedback, coaching, and suggestions.

7. After each role play, thank the actors by clapping, and allow the class to discuss, with the officers input, questions such as:
   - How typical was this situation? Did this seem realistic?
   - Characterize the behavior of the citizens in this scene. Were they being responsible, positive community members? Explain.
   - We began class speaking of characteristics that make a good police officer. Did the police in this scene represent those characteristics?
   - To the actors playing the citizens and police: Why did you make the choices you made?
• To the audience: Do you agree with the choices made by the citizens and the police in this scene? Explain.
• If you personally were in this situation (as a citizen and/or a police officer) how would you have handled the situation differently?
• Was this a crime call or a service call? Were any laws broken at any point?
• Would anyone have been arrested if this really happened and why?
• What other choices might the citizens in the scene have made (discuss positive choices and negative choices) and what might the consequences have been?

Optional: As you discuss alternate choices with the group, you may wish to have the original students replay the scene. At the point an audience member, or your visiting police officer, believes they could make a better choice to diffuse the situation, they can yell “Freeze!” The actors will then freeze in their exact positions, and the audience member will tap one actor on the shoulder, signaling him/her to step out of the scene. The audience member will then take that actor’s exact position, and then the scene will come back to life, with the audience member improvising his/her idea in the scene.

8. After all groups have role played and discussed their situations, consider the following questions with the group:
   • How did it feel to play the role of the citizens/police officers?
   • What have you learned about police work? What role do police serve in our school and community?
   • What do you think might be the hardest part of police work?
   • What responsibilities do citizens have when dealing with police? What responsibilities do police have when dealing with citizens?
   • Do you think most people really understand the nature of police work? Why or why not?
   • If you are confronted by an officer of the law, what is the best way to advocate for yourself and your rights?
   • How do you think fear affects police/community relations? (Think about the fear of both citizens and police.) What are police risking by doing their job each day?

9. Allow students time to ask questions of the police officer.

10. In closing, have students look at the list of characteristics again and ask:
    • Are there any characteristics you think should be changed or added after participating in this activity?
    • Has your mind changed regarding which characteristics you voted as the most important? Explain.
Police Call Scenarios

**Police Call Scenario 1: Summer Basketball**

Your group will act out a skit in which some kids are playing basketball in the park late at night. Several other people are in the park—some playing basketball, some playing tennis, and some walking dogs. The kids playing basketball are enjoying the game so much they have forgotten what time it is. A neighbor calls the police because it is past the kids’ curfew, and she doesn’t think it is safe for them to be out so late.

**Roles:**
- Two or three friends playing basketball
- Someone walking their dog
- Two people playing tennis
- Mrs. Johnson, a neighbor who lives close to the park

**Caller:**

“There are some noisy kids hanging out in the park, and it’s past their curfew.”

**Police Call Scenario 2: Fighting After the Football Game**

Your group will act out a skit in which a fight breaks out after a football game. Chris and his friend Tyrone are heading to their car after a football game when they see a fight between two younger children. Since one of the younger children, Jeff, is Chris’s neighbor, Chris tries to help Jeff out. Soon some other kids and teenagers notice the fight and begin to take sides. One of the adults leaving the game uses a cell phone to call the police and break up the fight before people get seriously hurt.

**Roles:**
- Chris and Tyrone
- Jeff, Chris’s neighbor
- Larry, who is fighting with Jeff
- Other kids who join in the fight
- Mr. or Mrs. Jones, adult who sees the fight

**Caller:**

“Police, come quickly! There is a big fight in the parking lot, and I’m afraid someone’s going to get hurt!”

**Police Call Scenario 3: Protesting**

Your group will act out a skit in which a group of children and their parents are protesting a school closing. The parents are upset that the school in their neighborhood will be closed. They will have to send their children to a school farther from their homes. They are afraid for their children’s safety going to and from school. They make signs and march in front of the district office. Some of them are loud because they want district officials to hear them. A secretary sees a crowd gathering outside and angry people shouting. The secretary is afraid that they might get violent.

**Roles:**
- One or two students protesting with their parents
- Several parents protesting
- The secretary at the district office

**Caller:**

“There is a mob outside the office. I’m afraid to leave the building!”
Police Call Scenario 4: Hanging Out

Your group will act out a skit in which a large group of kids are hanging out after school on a street corner near the school. Most of the kids who hang out on the corner don’t cause any trouble. They rent movies at the video store on the corner and buy snacks in the nearby fast food restaurant. Sometimes other people have trouble walking on the crowded sidewalk and get annoyed with the kids. The shopkeepers think that the kids are causing trouble for customers coming into their store, so the video store clerk calls the police.

Roles:
Two or three kids **hanging out on the corner**
One or two **customers** coming into the store
The **clerk** at the video store

Caller: “There is a group of kids loitering outside my store, and they are bothering my customers!”

Police Call Scenario 5: Noisy, Nasty Neighbors

Your group will act out a skit in which neighbors are fighting. The Jackson’s and the Green’s don’t get along with each other. The Greens like to have friends over and often get really loud. The Jackson’s are sick of the noise. Now, the Jackson’s and the Greens are always calling each other names and threatening each other. Cory, who lives across the street, hears them fighting but is afraid to do anything. Cory’s next door neighbor Jasmine hears them too and is sick of it. One day when the Jackson’s and the Green’s are especially loud, Jasmine calls the police.

Roles:
People in the Jackson family
People in the Green family
Cory and Jasmine, neighbors of the Jackson’s and Green’s

Caller: “Police, come quickly. My neighbors are fighting and threatening each other and I’m sick of it!”
## Police Call Response Chart

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<tr>
<th>Summary of what happened in the scene</th>
<th>Vocabulary/Discussion Connections</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
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