Spaghetti Park
by DyAnne DiSalvo

Overview
A purposeful story about determination and community. Angelo and his grandfather hate to see their local park deteriorate when hoodlums settle in-the swings are whipped up, the vegetables are smashed, and there is graffiti everywhere. Most people stay away. There is hesitation and downright rejection when the boy suggests the construction of a bocce ball court at the neighborhood meeting until Assembly Member Lopez suggests that if they all work together, they can clean up the area and offer something for everyone. Ultimately, Angelo’s perseverance and acceptance of others enable his dream to come true.

Grade 3

LEARNING TARGETS

✓ I can identify how Angelo makes a difference in the civic life of his community

✓ I can identify how a group addressed a specific problem or need in their community

✓ I can explain how Angelo’s participation at the Neighborhood Group was an important part of civic discourse
3.1.1.1 Identify ways people make a difference in the civic life of their communities, state, nation or world by working as individuals or groups to address a specific problem or need.

3.1.2.3.1 Explain the importance of civic discourse (including speaking, listening, voting and respecting diverse viewpoints) and the principles of majority rule and minority rights.

3.1.1.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

3.1.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

3.2.2.2 Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

3.6.1.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.
   i. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
   ii. Provide reasons that support the opinion.
   iii. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
   iv. Provide a concluding statement or section.
Read the first few pages of the book, until the picture of Angelo and his grandfather eating lemon ices. Stop and ask the class what Angelo’s problem is (the neighborhood park is unpleasant, so that most community members cannot use it.) Take a moment have them list specific examples that they saw in the book that demonstrate this problem. (troublemakers hang out there, music is played to loud, the swings are misused) Why do these behaviors keep neighbors from going to the park? (old people can’t sit on the benches, parents don’t feel safe with their children, things are messy and uncomfortable.)

Civics Standard 3.1.1.1
Language Arts Standard 3.1.1.1 3.1.3.3

Angelo’s dad attends a Neighborhood Group once a month. Why does he do this? (to discuss local issues)
What is a “local issue?” (situations or events that concern the people in the neighborhood) Do you think that “local issues” are always problems? Could you imagine a local issue that is a good thing? (a neighborhood carnival that needs to be planned, planting flowers on the corners of the streets, putting up neighborhood decorations for holidays) How does attending a meeting help with local issues that are problems? (as a group they can think of solutions, some problems might not be clear to everyone and at the meeting it can be explained, together they have more people to work on the problem) Look at the pictures of the Neighborhood Group – what do you notice about how people are talking? (people are expressing opinions, but not yelling, people look calm and are drinking coffee and eating cookies, people are listening and responding to what others have to say) Explain that this is an example of “civic discourse,” when citizens take part in their community by respectfully sharing opinions. Give the students a chance to tell about any “civic discourse” that they have seen.

Civics Standard 3.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1
Language Arts Standard 3.1.1.1 3.1.4.4

The neighbors get together to clean up the park, but it is wrecked again. Who do you think messed things up? Why would they do that? Some of the neighbors want to give up after this incident. Why? What do Angelo and his family think should be done? Why do you think they feel that way? If you were one of the neighbors, what would you want to do? Do you see any example of “civic discourse” in this part of the story? (the neighbors are expressing opinions, Angelo and his dad are trying to persuade the neighbors to act)

Civics Standard 3.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1
Language Arts Standard 3.1.1.1 3.1.3.3

The bocce ball court is an important part of the story. Why is it important? How is it different than any of the other ways that the neighborhood works to improve the park? (it draws different kinds of people together – the rough kids and the old folks are interested in bocce, it is a community effort to build it since it requires space and investment, it is something new and inspires people to work at the park) Most parks in Minnesota don’t have bocce ball courts. What kind of other parts of a park might get people interested in helping? (baseball diamond, soccer field, swimming pool) Do you think it made a difference to his community when Angelo suggested a bocce ball court at the Neighborhood Meeting?
At the grand opening of the bocce ball court, Angelo gives Richie the pallino (or target ball) to throw. Why would Angelo do this when Richie was one of the trouble-makers? Have students write an opinion paragraph using the following prompt:

Who do you think should have thrown the pallino for the grand opening of the bocce ball court? Why?

This story has several examples of “civil discourse.” Remember, civil discourse may be people talking about a problem, but it can be also be listening to others, respecting others opinions, finding solutions and more. As a class, come up with as many examples of civil discourse as you can from the book. Ask students to share other examples of civic discourse that they have seen or heard about.

Angelo and his family are determined to redo the park. Why? Many other people in the neighborhood were simply staying away and finding other places to go. Why didn’t Angelo and his family do that, too? As an “exit ticket” have students write an example of someone they know or have heard of who did something good for their community, state or nation.

Have students write “thank you” notes to people in their community who do things to improve civic life. Brainstorm ideas of people they could write – police officers, fire fighters, the mayor, city council members, school board members, volunteers at their school, veterans, or maybe people they know personally.

NOTES