

Ten-Minute Text Analysis

Instructions: Read the following selection proposing a mandatory year of volunteer service after high school, and answer all of the questions on the following page.

Amitai Etziona
A Year of National Service

A year of national service after high school could be the capstone of a student's educational experiences. More and more policy makers are supporting the idea of a year spent serving the country, interrupting the "lockstep" march from grade to grade and into and through college (or directly into the adult world of full-time work). It is a major way to build up the moral tenor and sense of social responsibility among the young. Although the suggested programs vary in detail, many favor a year of voluntary service that could be completed in places such as the armed forces, the Peace Corps, VISTA, or the Conservation Corps. Some would make it the senior year of high school; I prefer for it to follow high school, providing a year between school and college or between school and work for those who are not college-bound.

The merits of a year of national service range from primarily pragmatic to the more encompassing matter of character building. To begin with the pragmatic...A year of national service would remove many unemployed youths from the streets, it would provide them, often for the first time, with legitimate and meaningful work; and it would help to protect them from being enticed into crime. Above all, such service would provide a way to develop the character of those who serve, aside from whatever skills they might acquire. Indeed, much of the potential impact of national service lies in psychic development, in enhancing the individual's self-respect, sense of worth, and outlook on the future.

More important, national service would also provide a strong antidote to the ego-centered mentality as youth serve shared needs. An important criterion for including a particular service in the program should be its usefulness to the community. This could encompass myriad possibilities, from improving the environment and beautifying the land to tutoring youngsters having difficulty in school or helping the infirm in nursing homes. At the same time, forms of service that infringe on the rights of others would be excluded; for example, volunteers would not be given responsibilities that would, in effect, take away jobs by providing a pool of cheap labor.

Finally, a year of national service could serve as an important community builder because it would act as a great sociological mixer. At present, America provides few opportunities for shared experience and for developing shared values and bonds among people from different racial, class, and regional backgrounds. One of the major reasons for the low consensus-building capacity of American society is that schools are locally run. They do not subscribe to a common national curriculum, and they transmit different sets of regional, racial, or class values. A year of national service, especially if it was designed to enable people from different geographical and sociological backgrounds to live together, could be an effective way for boys and girls, whites and nonwhites, people from parochial and public schools, north and south, the city and the country, to come together constructively while working together on a common task.

Amitai Etziona. *The Spirit of Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

For Reflection

1. State the thesis of this selection in one sentence:

2. In no more than two sentences explain the evidence that Etziona gives to defend his thesis:

3. Explain what you think are the implications of Etziona's position:

4. Evaluate Etziona's position (explain whether you think Etziona's position is right or wrong and why.)