



The Samantha Smith Challenge

Learning Through Engaged Citizenship

Guidelines 2015/16

KEY DATES

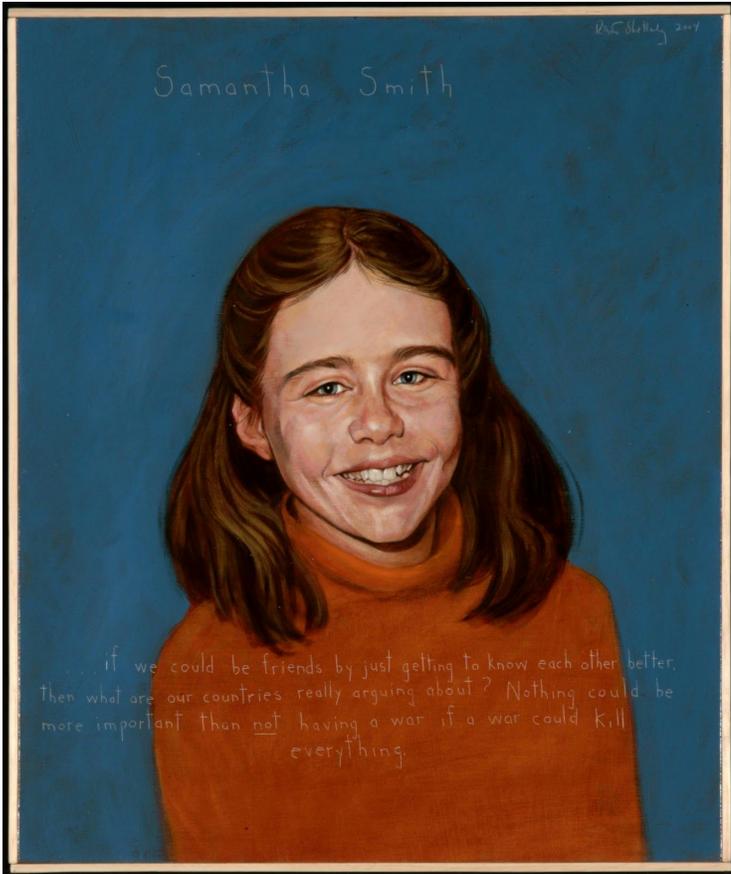
- **OCTOBER 22-23, 2015:** Launch 2nd Annual SSC at MAMLE Conference.
- **JANUARY 15, 2016:** School and class registration deadline for SSC.
- **FEBRUARY/MARCH 2016:** SSC workshops/school visits.
- **APRIL 1, 2016:** Teachers confirm student participation in Samantha Smith Day and submit issue and progress reports.
- **MAY 1, 2016:** SSC projects & videos are submitted to AWTT.
- **JUNE 6, 2016:** Samantha Smith Day celebration for SSC participants from around the state of Maine.

Once you have read through this document, feel free to contact us for advice, guidance, contacts to help you explore your issues, or anything else that will make your experience richer, more rewarding, and educational.

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WHY THE SAMANTHA SMITH CHALLENGE?



Americans Who Tell the Truth (AWTT) included Samantha Smith's portrait in the series to honor her initiative as she engaged a crisis -- the Cold War and the nuclear arms race -- and did something to make the world better, advocating for open communication and peace. Samantha left us a legacy and a challenge: What can we do to encourage more people -- especially young citizens -- to stand up, speak out and engage in positive service to improve our world? For a second year, the Maine Association of Middle Level Education (MAMLE) and Americans Who Tell the Truth (AWTT) are joining as partners to offer that encouragement and to honor Samantha with the **Samantha Smith Challenge**.

Samantha's Story

In December 1982, ten year old Samantha Smith of Manchester, Maine, asked her mother if there was going to be a war. She said, "I asked my mother who would start a war and why. She showed me a news magazine with a story about America and Russia, one that had a picture of the new Russian leader, Yuri Andropov, on the cover. We read it together. It seemed that the people in both Russia and America were worried that the other country would start a nuclear war. It all seemed so dumb to me. I had learned about the awful things that had happened during World War II, so I thought that nobody would ever want to have another war. I told Mom that she should write to Mr. Andropov to find out who was causing all the trouble. She said, 'Why don't you write to him?' So I did."

From that one question, a peace-making venture unfolded that brought Russian and American students together to build understanding and appreciation of one another and to focus on building connections instead of armies. Sadly, in August 1985, both Samantha and her father were killed in a plane crash. But Samantha's memory lives on in her courageous example.

Following this example of engaged citizenship, the purpose of the Samantha Smith Challenge is to build a bridge between the classroom and the community and show students that, no matter what age, they can be part of solving the challenges and problems they see in the world.

Samantha's journey began over 30 years ago when she wrote a letter to Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov asking him to, "Please tell me how you are going to help to not have war." Just a year later she was an eleven year old teaching adults and children about making peace. Her progress from concern to courageous engagement began with a series of small steps and decisions—something each of us can do!

The Samantha Smith Challenge encourages every Maine middle level student and classroom to start making a difference right now.

What can you do to make the world a better place?

All you have to do is take the first step. Accept the challenge!

GETTING STARTED

Exploring Americans Who Tell the Truth

THE INTRODUCTION: Before jumping right into the Samantha Smith Challenge itself (see *page 9*) it's important that students begin to understand some of the characteristics of Samantha and the other people in the AWTT collection who have tackled challenging issues. The following **three activities** are aimed at getting students acquainted with the breadth of issues and people represented in the AWTT portraits and preparing them to launch their challenge in the most effective way.

A quick note on Standards. The SSC is applicable to a wide range of academic standards, including the Common Core, CASEL's social and emotional literacy standards, and the 21st Century Learning Standards.

Educator Nancy Doda, PhD, compiled a list of the "Power Standards" most relevant to the SSC. [You can see her list and comments in this PDF.](#)

Introductory Step 1: Share [Samantha Smith's story](#). Have your students learn and discuss why she was chosen as an Americans Who Tell the Truth portrait subject. [Watch the Samantha Smith interview with Ted Koppel here.](#)

Introductory Step 2: Watch the following videos, which will give you and your students a better sense of the spirit of The Samantha Smith Challenge and how we think about engaged citizenship.

- [Senator Angus King's statement at the 1st annual SSC.](#)
- [Ryan Hreljac, a young water rights activist from Canada.](#)
- [Lyman Moore Middle School responds to the SSC.](#)
- [Leonard Middle School combats poverty for the SSC.](#)
- [King Middle School address sustainable energy with SSC.](#)
- [Messalonskee Middle School took on hunger in their community for the SSC.](#)

Going Deeper: Acquaint your students with AWTT using one or all of the following activities that focus on collaborative classroom study, research and writing, and expressing beliefs and emotions through art.

Activity 1: Collaborative Exploration

- A. Ask your students to read the following AWTT mission statement.

Robert Shetterly's Americans Who Tell the Truth portraits and narratives highlight citizens who courageously address issues of social, environmental, and economic fairness. By combining art and other media, AWTT offers resources to inspire a new generation of engaged Americans who will act for the common good, our communities, and the Earth.

- B. After reading the statement, go to www.americanswhotellthetruth.org.
C. Click on [Portrait Galleries link](#) at the top of the home page.
D. Skim over portraits shown or click on *Themes* and choose portraits from a theme of interest.
E. Select 3-4 people Shetterly has chosen to paint – one well-known person, 2-3 you don't know.
F. Fill out the following information below for each portrait (1,2,3,4) you choose.

What issue did this person address?

What moments/issues inspired this person's work or efforts?

What qualities make this person worthy of being painted?

Why do you think Robert Shetterly chose to paint this person?

- G. Have small groups of students (3-4) engage each other by
- Sharing the story of one truth teller.
 - Explaining why s/he thinks Shetterly chose that person and what issue the truth teller addressed.
- H. Come back together as a class and have each group present one or two truth tellers to the whole class.

Activity 2: Writing Exploration – Bringing the story to life

- A. Either individually or in small groups ask your students to go to www.americanswhotellthetruth.org
- B. Each student will then choose a Truth Teller he or she wants to learn about and complete the following activity:
 - i. Select the Truth Teller to research.
 - ii. Read the biography of the Truth Teller on www.americanswhotellthetruth.org
 - iii. Find two additional resources about the Truth Teller and read them.
 - iv. Tell a story about the Truth Teller keeping in mind the following guidelines:
 - Ground it in the events of the Truth Teller’s life.
 - Make it real.
 - Talk about moments when this Truth Teller was tested or challenged.
 - Discover and tell two things about this person that are not common knowledge.

Some prompt questions to help inspire imaginative writing:

- What do you admire about this person?
- What would you like to say to this person if you could have a conversation with him/her?
- What’s one story that reveals the essence of this person?

Some tips for writing a good story:

- Be personal and brief.
- Be specific.
- Name the belief or cause that is central to your Truth Teller’s life.
- Write in words or phrases that are comfortable for you to speak.

*Some storytelling suggestions: **

- **Be descriptive!** Don’t say “bus” when you can say “run down city bus with doors that don’t close”.

- **Don't tell, but show.** Don't tell **about** anger or truth or justice; **show** what made your Truth Teller angry or what act was unjust.
- **Tell the truth!** Skip the "This is a story about truth" line and move right into what the specific "truth" is.

Possible formats for your writing:

- **A short story.** Pick one incident or critical moment and tell it as a first person story (as though you were Barbara Johns, Samantha Smith or Abraham Lincoln).
- **A letter.** Write to the Truth Teller explaining you do or don't understand about the Truth Teller and his/her work.
- **A rap.** Add movement or beat boxing to animate your story.
- **Slam poetry.** Think spoken word, powerful emotions, smiles, & tears.

The storytelling suggestions are based on **This I Believe in association with National Public Radio and *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott.*

Activity 3: Artistic Exploration -- Crafting what you believe

The Art: Not surprisingly, we at AWTT believe that Art can be an especially powerful mode of expression and catalyst for change. Many students have used visual art, music, and poetry to convey their feelings about an issue or a Truth Teller who inspires them. Often students respond most powerfully to the truth tellers in their own communities. We always encourage them to identify and research these close-to-home courageous citizens, whether they be parents, teachers, janitors, neighbors, coaches or other influential figures in their lives.

- A. Either individually or in small groups ask your students to go to www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

- B. Each student will then choose a Truth Teller he or she wants to learn about and complete the following activity:
- i. Select the Truth Teller to research.
 - ii. Read the biography of the Truth Teller on www.americanswhotellthetruth.org
 - iii. Find two additional resources about the Truth Teller and read them.
 - iv. Create a piece of art about the Truth Teller. It could be any genre that enables them to express what they want to convey:
 - a collage
 - a drawing or painting
 - a poem
 - a rap
 - a sculpture
 - a piece of music
- C. Create an event, either for your class, your school, or the public that allows students to share their artistic tributes of the Truth Tellers.

THE SAMANTHA SMITH CHALLENGE

11 Steps to Engaged Citizenship

Now that students are acquainted with some of the AWTT portrait subjects and their work, they are ready to apply the lessons they have learned, to choose an issue and become engaged citizens.

1. FIND YOUR ISSUE. Ask students to choose an issue that is important to them.

Individual students, a group, or an entire class should pick a meaningful issue – a problem in their community, state, country or the world that matters to them and that they are motivated to help solve. (See *examples of past projects below.*)

Possible approaches to choosing an issue:

- Have your class brainstorm together.
- Present an issue that you know is of concern in the community.
- Invite a panel of community members to talk with your class about community concerns/issues.
- Go to the AWTT website for ideas. Check out the Themes section on the [Portrait Galleries page](#) or review issues that are of concern to specific portrait subjects.

Going deeper. Explore the resource links on the righthand side of the portrait pages to learn more about the Truth Teller and his/her subject.

In addition, here are some videos of the portrait subjects speaking, that might be helpful to your class as they think about what to address and how to do it.

- [Tim DeChristopher](#) talks with [Bill Moyers about building a community to create change](#).
- [Claudette Colvin](#) explains [why she didn't get up from her bus seat in 1951](#) in Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Diane Wilson](#) tells a group of students [what it was like when she decided to protect the bay she relied on for her livelihood](#).
- [Bill McKibben](#) talks about [what needs to happen to address climate change](#).

2. BUILD SKILLS. Participate in online and in-person Smith Challenge Workshops to learn important tools for gathering support for your project. Our network of workshop participants can include professional storytellers and documentarians, living Truth Tellers (subjects of Robert Shetterly’s portraits), educators committed to connecting learning to real world issues, and others. Learn the following:

- Effective storytelling techniques for winning allies to your cause.
- Successful organizing tactics to get your community participating in your efforts.
- Perspectives that may deepen your understanding of how your community works.
- Want to connect with a living Portrait Subject? Get in touch with AWTT and we will facilitate this link.

3. ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS. Determine the “Samantha” question?

State the issue the individual, group, class has selected as a question, e.g.,

- Why are there homeless people in my community?
- What should the minimum wage be?
- What kind of energy can take us sustainably into the future?
- How can our school/town reduce its carbon footprint?
- What can we do to address bullying in our school?

4. DISCOVERY. Do research and find the facts about the issue.

Go to the [Portrait Galleries on the AWTT](#) website and explore by themes. See if the student-chosen issue is represented there. If so, read about the portrait subjects who have addressed that issue. Use them as starting points. Also use the resources that are listed beside the portraits. Contact AWTT if there is **a living portrait subject** with whom your students may want to connect. Many of them are happy to speak with students! (connie@americanswhotellthetruth.org)

5. ARTICULATE WHAT YOU THINK. Create a presentation that tells what the students know, have learned, think, and feel about the selected issue.

The presentation may be in the form of paintings, original musical compositions, essays, theater skits or any other form of expression that best communicates their concern and responds to the academic needs of your classroom. In addition, these presentations will give the stakeholders (see #6 below) something to which they can respond.

6. FIND THE INTERESTED PARTIES. Determine stakeholder(s) who are involved in either maintaining or changing the selected situation/issue. The stakeholder(s) may be a local representative, the governor, a CEO, banker, father, mother, coach, teacher, community leader, reporter, farmer, engineer, or anyone else who might be able to work with the students on their concern. Let the students decide the most appropriate people to contact.

Guidelines for contacting stakeholders:

- Write a letter or e-mail to the stakeholders.
 - Clearly state the concern and the reasons for concern.
 - If possible, share the presentation created in step 5.
 - Ask for a meeting to discuss the issue.
 - Ask for contacts of people who may be able to help with this concern.
 - Inform the stakeholder that you will follow up with him/her once you have a plan to address the problem you have chosen to focus on.

Be persistent and resourceful! Follow up. Contact stakeholders more than once. Let them know you are serious!

7. WIN ALLIES. Invite the stakeholder(s) to work with you to address the selected issue.

Need help finding stakeholders? Contact AWTT. We will put you in touch with portrait subjects and other community leaders when we can.

8. ACTION PLAN. Together with the stakeholder(s) develop a plan of action for the students and stakeholder(s) to follow.

Write an action plan and assign duties. Also, what can other people do to help? Write up a set of suggestions for others who might want to get involved.

9. TAKE ACTION!

Implement your action plan and make the student voices heard. Share your PSA's, letters to the editor, videos about the story of your issue, or consider creating a community event by following the suggested Community Event Guide below.

A Community Event Guide

Introduction

- A. As a group, students will verbally introduce the project or projects – the issue, their question, the story of their journey, and their action.
- B. This introduction will be
 - energetic
 - brief (10-12 minutes)
 - engaging – make people want to ask questions and look at the exhibit

The Displays

- A. Students will stand professionally beside their displays as the invited community members explore the work.
- B. Students will give a brief description of their project for the people looking their work and be prepared to answer questions from the public.

The Closing

- A. Students and audience gather together for a closing discussion.
- B. Audience has an opportunity to ask questions of students in a respectful way.
- C. Students ask audience to share comments about their projects and suggest ways in which they might help students with these projects.
- D. Final comments and reflections from students that may include asking the community to work with them on their issues.

10. SPREAD THE WORD. Make a 3-4 minute video that tells the STORY of your issue, a bit of your research, and your action.

OR

Make 1-2 minute video that is a PSA about your issue that will convince others to join your cause.

Share your video with Americans Who Tell the Truth by submitting it on the Samantha Smith Challenge Page (directions for this to come later) and Complete the Project Description information form on the Samantha Smith Challenge page.

11. NETWORK & SHARE. Join all the SSC participants on Samantha Smith Day -- June 6, 2016 -- to present your projects, meet other challenge participants, and celebrate the engaged citizenship of Maine middle school students!

AND REMEMBER! CONTACT US FOR ADVICE, GUIDANCE, CONTACTS OR ANYTHING ELSE THAT WILL MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCE RICHER, MORE REWARDING, AND EDUCATIONAL.

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