

## Senior Citizens in Chicago

### Introduction

Senior citizens make up a growing population in Chicago and around the country. For many reasons, it is important for students to learn about the lives, histories, and present day realities of our senior citizens. Interestingly, senior citizens and young people have a lot in common. Through working with senior citizens, young people will get a chance to discover these commonalities while learning about history, culture, sociology, health, and other subjects.

Many CPS students have earned Service Learning credit by working with senior citizens. Students have assisted at senior citizen centers, participated in intergenerational projects, hosted senior citizen proms, visited nursing homes, etc. This curriculum guide is designed to connect these important experiences with academic content. It is divided into six sections:

- ✓ Facts and figures about aging
- ✓ Activities designed to explore and understand aging
- ✓ Service project ideas
- ✓ Resources (people, organizations, websites)
- ✓ Classroom connections
- ✓ Connections to state standards

Remember this is a curriculum guide. The teacher can determine the length of the unit. Use the resources in this guide as preparation for students participating in a service project that involves senior citizens. Thanks for helping students gain a high quality Service Learning experience.

## Facts and Figures about Aging

### Demographics of Aging

- ✓ There are 35 million people in the U.S. age 65 and older. That's about 12 percent of the population.
- ✓ The median household income for U.S. householders age 65 and older is \$23,047.
- ✓ 14% of Americans age 65 and older are employed.
- ✓ There are 49,000 Americans age 65 and older enrolled in colleges and universities.
- ✓ Among the U.S. population 65–74 years old, 77 % of men and 53 % of women live with their spouses.
- ✓ The percentage of Americans age 65 and older living in nursing homes is 4.5 %, which is down from 5.1 % in 1990. The decline was sharpest among those age 85 and over: 18.2 percent lived in nursing homes in 2000; 24.5 percent did so in 1990.
- ✓ The percentage of U.S. citizens age 65 to 74 who voted in the 2000 presidential election was 72% – the highest of any age group.
- ✓ The proportion of U.S. householders age 65 to 74 who own their own home is 81%. This is the highest home–ownership rate of any age group.
- ✓ The last Census revealed that the fastest growing states for older people are Nevada, Alaska, Arizona and New Mexico. (Florida still has the most).
- ✓ The U.S. ranks second in the number among countries of people age 80 and over. (China ranks first).
- ✓ There are 70 men age 65 and older for every 100 women.
- ✓ There were 50,454 centenarians counted in Census 2000 – about one in every 5,578 people.

## Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

- ✓ According to the U.S. Census, **2.4 million** grandparents are primary caregivers to their grandchildren, a phenomenon that the U.S. Census Bureau tracked for the first time in 2000. Roughly one in five (18.9 %) live in poverty.
- ✓ There are 213,465 children in Illinois under the age of 18 living in a grandparent-headed household (which includes houses in which a parent is living). This represents nearly a **30% increase** since the 1990 Census. **Nearly 104,000 grandparents are raising their grandchildren in Illinois.**
- ✓ Illinois ranks fifth in the nation in the number of children being raised by grandparents, behind California, New York, Texas and Florida. Nationally, about 4.5 million children live with their grandparents (this figure reflects households in which a parent may also reside).
- ✓ According to the Census data, the majority of grandparents raising grandchildren have been responsible for their grandchildren for a year or more, and 35% have been raising them for at least five years.
- ✓ Factors contributing to the growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren include: substance abuse; neglect, abuse and abandonment; death of a parent; HIV/AIDS; divorce; unemployment and poverty; parental incarceration; teen pregnancy; and welfare reform.
- ✓ The median age of a grandparent raising grandchildren is 57.
- ✓ Grandparents may be caring for children with little advance notice. They have stepped forward to care for children often at tremendous personal sacrifice. They may encounter difficulty with legal, financial, health, education, medical and other matters.

## Health and Nutrition

- ✓ The National Institute on Aging advises that a daily diet for seniors should include at least two servings of milk (or dairy products low in lactose); two servings of high protein foods like lean meat, eggs, legumes and nuts; four servings of fruit and vegetables; and four servings of bread or cereal.
- ✓ Generally, daily calorie needs decline with age, but there is no decrease in the need for nutrients. Thus, foods should be chosen for nutrition density. Daily calorie intake for a moderately active elderly man or woman who is neither obese nor malnourished should be in the range of 10 to 14 calories per pound (for someone of 150 pounds, 1,500 to 2,100 calories).
- ✓ Difficulties in chewing, a limited food budget, and digestive problems may provide obstacles to adequate protein intake for some seniors. Protein can be supplied by soups, small portions of lean meat or fish, eggs, cottage cheese, and vegetable proteins.
- ✓ For the body to use calcium, there must be sufficient vitamin D. Older people who do not get much sunshine and who avoid vitamin D–enriched dairy foods may need a supplement (with a doctor’s approval).
- ✓ Eating in pleasant surroundings – at a table with dishes instead of eating out of containers, or with the accompaniment of music or a radio if eating alone – may help those with a loss of appetite. Many older people also lose interest in food as the number and sensitivity of taste buds diminish.
- ✓ A meal may represent a cultural and social event as much as a physiological necessity. Friends and family can help with shopping and menu ideas, or help the frail older person receive home–delivered meals or find a group meal site nearest to the older person. These programs are funded by the Illinois Department on Aging and Area Agencies on Aging and provided through community agencies throughout the state.

*—Facts and Figures taken from the Illinois Department on Aging*

## Activities Designed to Explore and Understand Aging

### Inquiry into Aging

The following activities can be used as an inquiry process for a week-long unit. Begin with a short open-ended set of questions for students to answer independently. Student answers can lead to an honest, open discussion of various issues related to aging.

- ✓ What is old age?
- ✓ Who is the oldest person you know? How old is that person?
- ✓ Name five organizations that work with senior citizens?
- ✓ What is Social Security?
- ✓ What is disability pay? How much does it provide for a senior citizen?
- ✓ Who lives in assisted living centers?
- ✓ What is a nursing home?
- ✓ What organizations do you personally know that work with senior citizens?
- ✓ What type of activities are you willing to do with senior citizens?

Ask students to read responses from the group and then discuss answers. This activity can be completed in a single class period.

As a follow-up inquiry activity, divide your class into five smaller groups with a minimum of five students in each group. Assign one of the following topics to each group. Each group should then decide how to investigate the topic.

- ✓ **Housing Issues** – students should investigate various types of assisted living centers in the Chicagoland area. Provide a starter list of places to call and visit if possible (see resource section). Students should bring back literature and pamphlets for other students. Students can also create a database or file of these facilities. Students should compare and contrast the services and fees offered by these facilities as well as the diverse living accommodations available to seniors.
- ✓ **Social Fun Times** – charge your second group of students with the task of investigating social activities available to senior citizens who reside in their own homes or apartments. Ask one or more students to conduct an Internet search for activities through the Chicago Park District or Department of Aging.
- ✓ **Classes and Lectures** – Senior citizens are as diverse as our youth. Senior citizens are interested in many different kinds of classes. The Chicago Department of Aging has the most complete guide to classes and lectures. They also offer field trips for seniors. Once students begin to develop a fairly comprehensive list of activities, they should organize them into a database. In addition to many others, students are likely to learn about lectures on depression, living wills, travels or book discussions. Ask your students to go to one senior center and bring back some of the handouts that are available. Handouts range from dieting to understanding labels.

- ✓ **Organizations that Support Senior Citizens** – Ask this student group to conduct a survey or search of what is available in their own community for seniors. Offerings might include discounts for going to the movies or weekly shopping discounts. Stores might offer special incentives for seniors such as free coffee. Have one student investigate Senior Olympics. Other organizations might offer citizenship classes, community safety meetings, resources and support for Grandparents as caregivers, energy assistance, home maintenance referrals, and support classes for completing forms for various governmental agencies. One student may do a search of various organizations such as Catholic Charities or the Jewish United Fund and what is being done for their seniors who are involved with these religious organizations. Have one student investigate social security and its role for senior citizens. Have one student do a search of publications that are suited for seniors. Have that student bring to class samples of magazines.
- ✓ **Health Support** - This group of students could start by calling the neighborhood hospitals and inquiring about network support for seniors in their neighborhoods and in their homes. What is a visiting nurse and who is entitled to the services of one? What clinics are available and what do senior citizens pay for these services? One student might call Walgreens and do an Internet search about five of the most common drugs that senior citizens take and how they vary in price. Meals on Wheels might send in a guest speaker to the group of students.

At the end of the inquiry process, ask each student group to report its findings. The knowledge gained by the whole group will be impressive and provide good preparation for a service project.

During the inquiry process, you can continue to engage students in learning about senior citizens by facilitating the following activities.

## Path of Life

Here are some milestones in the typical American lifetime. Take a few moments to think about your own future. Put the number of the milestone on the Path of Life where you imagine that milestone will happen for you. Feel free to add your own milestones, or delete listed milestones, if they are not in your plans. Please note that the milestones are not listed in any particular order.

1. Get a job
2. Get a part-time job
3. Establish a checking account
4. Rent your own apartment/house
5. Get married
6. Have children
7. Buy a house/condo
8. Buy your first car
9. Finish education/career training
10. Start a retirement plan
11. Retire
12. Have grandchildren
13. Have great grandchildren
14. Travel to other countries
15. Do volunteer work to help others
16. Help take care of your parents
17. Learn a new hobby or pastime
18. Learn a new sport or dance
19. Start financial plans for your kids' education
20. Plan kids graduation from high school

—Source: *Chicago Department on Aging*



## Aging in America: A Tapestry of Life

**Your Mission:** (Compare Aging in Two Different Cultures)

**Your Task:** find two people over the age of 55. They must be from two different cultures. Fill out the Profile Information Form, then ask the questions. You can do the interviews at the same time if you are lucky enough to get two people together or interview them separately at different times. You can even use the telephone or e-mail. Try to get interesting answers! People like to talk if you seem interested and ask fun thought provoking questions. Be a *Fact Detective*.

QUESTION	PERSON #1	PERSON #2
Where were your grandparents born? What language did they speak?		
What caused them to move to a new location?		
Overall, how does your culture treat older people?		
At about what age is someone considered "elderly" or "old" in your culture?		
Are older men and older women treated the same or differently in your culture? Explain.		
In your culture, what kinds of things does the government do for older people?		
What kind of music do older people in your culture tend to like best? Give names of songs and singers.		
What are some of the favorite foods of older people in your culture?		

QUESTION	PERSON #1	PERSON #2
What are some of the most serious problems older people in your culture have to face?		
What are some good things about being an older person in your culture?		
Where were you born?		
Name all of the cities in which you have lived.		
What do <i>you think</i> makes a person age well in America?		
What are the most serious problems that <i>you think</i> all Americans face?		
What are the most serious problems that <i>you think</i> American teenagers have to face?		
What advice would you give to today's teenagers on how to have a happy life?		
<b>What is your most treasured possession? Why?</b>		
What are three words that you would use to describe yourself?		
What kinds of things do you like to do in your spare time?		

—Source: *Chicago Department on Aging*

## Profile Information Form

### Person #1

Name:

Cultural Background:

Birth Date:

Date of Interview:

Type of Interview: face to face, phone, e-mail, other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Person #2

Name:

Cultural Background:

Birth Date:

Date of Interview:

Type of Interview: face to face, phone, e-mail, other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interviewer

Your Name:

Cultural Background

Birth Date:

School:

School Address:

Teacher:

## Aging Across America Pop Quiz

1. The majority of older adults will become senile during old age. T F
2. Chronological age (your age in years) is the most important determinant of age. T F
3. Most seniors have difficulty adapting to change; they are “set in their ways.” T F
4. Being inactive contributes more to physical decline than aging itself. T F
5. Intelligence declines in old age; “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” T F
6. Physical strength tends to decline in old age. T F
7. The vast majority of older adults will end up in a nursing home. T F
8. Most older adults are rejected by their children. T F
9. In general, most older adults are similar. T F
10. Pain is a natural part of the aging process. T F
11. Rarely does someone over 65 produce a great work of art, science or scholarship. T F
12. With age comes wisdom. T F
13. Most older adults have income well above the poverty level. T F
14. Most older adults say they are happy all the time. T F
15. Decline of the senses occurs in old age. T F
16. The majority of older adults say they are angry or irritated most of the time. T F
17. Older people tend to become more religious as they age. T F
18. The majority of older adults say they are lonely. T F
19. Old age is really like a “second childhood.” T F
20. Most older adults experience a lack of interest in sex – they become “asexual.” T F

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: Linda M. Woolf, Ph.D, Webster University [www.webster.edu/~woolf/m/myth17.html](http://www.webster.edu/~woolf/m/myth17.html) (Adapted)

# AGING ACROSS AMERICA

## POP QUIZ

### ANSWERS

1. The majority of older adults will become senile during old age. T F  
**FALSE.** Most studies estimate that only 2-3% of people in their 70s experience some form of dementia; 5-10% in their 80s; 20-30% in the 90s.
  
2. Chronological age (your age in years) is the most important determinant of age. T F  
**FALSE.** Chronological age (the number of years you have lived) is not as important as FUNCTIONAL age, how well one is able to function in his/her environment. The three factors that make up functional age are: psychological age, social age, and physiological/biological age. We have all met people who are biologically near the end of their life span, but are independent, creative, vibrant, and well able to meet life's challenges.
  
3. Most seniors have difficulty adapting to change; they are "set in their ways." T F  
**FALSE.** Individuals who have trouble with adapting when they are younger become older people with the same problem. It is a personality trait, and not something that comes with being older.
  
4. Being inactive contributes more to physical decline than aging itself. T F  
**TRUE.** Almost all of the characteristics we tend to associate from "aging" are actually caused from having a sedentary lifestyle!
  
5. Intelligence declines in old age; "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." T F  
**MOSTLY FALSE.** Most adults do not experience any decline in intellectual abilities with age. However, some diseases and illness may lead to intellectual declines, so can living in a deprived environment (lack of stimulation, poverty, etc.)
  
6. Physical strength tends to decline in old age. T F  
**TRUE.** However, exercise can counteract and limit this kind of decline. Thus, someone who is 65 and exercises regularly will probably be in better shape and have greater strength than a 40-year-old couch potato.
  
7. The vast majority of older adults will end up in a nursing home. T F  
**FALSE.** Only about 5% of older adults in the United States live in a long-term care facility.
  
8. Most older adults are rejected by their children. T F  
**FALSE.** Studies demonstrate that over 70% of older adults have a child living nearby. Many factors affect parent-child relationships. Typically, close families do not fall apart simply because a parent has aged.

9. In general, most older adults are similar. T F

**FALSE.** In fact, studies show that the older population is LESS alike than any other age group! People's life experiences tend to shape them across their life spans. However, older adults who are ill or suffering from chronic disease do seem to be more alike. This is the exception.

10. Pain is a natural part of the aging process. T F

**FALSE.** Pain is a sign of injury or illness. Pain should never be ignored!

11. Rarely does someone over 65 produce a great work of art, science or scholarship. T F

**FALSE.** The creative and scholarly work of older adults is amazing. One study suggests that the 60s (the age, not the decade) are the most productive years for historians, inventors, botanists, philosophers, and writers.

12. With age comes wisdom. T F

**MOSTLY FALSE.** Studies tend to show people who were wise when they were young are wise when they are old; people don't necessarily become "wise" with age.

13. Most older adults have income well above the poverty level. T F

**TRUE AND FALSE.** This is somewhat deceptive, because the federal poverty level is LOWER for seniors than for the rest of the population. Many, many seniors still have trouble paying for medications, housing, and food, even if they are "above" the federal poverty level for senior citizens.

14. Most older adults say they are happy all the time. T F

**TRUE.** The majority of older adults report high levels of life satisfaction. The more socially active an individual is, the higher the life satisfaction.

15. Decline of the senses occurs in old age. T F

**MOSTLY TRUE.** Across all cultures, there are declines in visual ability; however, loss of hearing seems to occur mostly because of NOISE! Studies show that low-noise level cultures (nomadic and farming cultures) do not exhibit hearing loss with age.

16. The majority of older adults say they are angry or irritated most of the time. T F

**FALSE.** Basically, only people who are always angry and irritated when they are young become older people who are always angry and irritated.

17. Older people tend to become more religious as they age. T F

**FALSE.** How religious you are tends to stay the same across your life span. People don't tend to "become" more religious as they get older. Religious younger people become religious older people. In the United States, older people are more religious than younger people because of the time and culture in which they were raised.

18. The majority of older adults say they are lonely. T F

**FALSE.** Surveys show that over 2/3 of the senior population report rarely or never being lonely. Young people and middle adults experience the same level of reported loneliness. HOWEVER, research also suggests that urban living is associated with higher levels of loneliness than living in a small town.

19. Old age is really like a “second childhood.” T F

**FALSE.** The human life span goes in only one direction. Older adults are ADULTS and should be treated as such, even if the elder is stricken by illness or disability.

20. Most older adults experience a lack of interest in sex – they become “asexual.” T F

**FALSE.** This is a great myth. Contrary to the stereotype, sexuality continues to be an important aspect of an older adult’s life. Sexuality is not just a biological function; it also includes the expression of feelings and self in a variety of ways in an intimate relationship.

## When I'm Sixty Four

Take some time to think ahead to the time you will be the age 64.  
Fill in the columns.

	NOW	WHEN I'M SIXTY FOUR
The people I like to hang out with		
What I like to do with my spare time		
Who I live with		
How I get money to live		
What I enjoy learning about		
Favorite Physical Activity		
What makes me happy		
What upsets me		

## Service Project Ideas

The following examples of service project ideas represent just a few of the dozens of potential projects that have been completed successfully in Chicago. Brainstorm with your students, colleagues and organizations that serve senior citizens for additional project ideas.

- ✓ Elderly immigrants face particular obstacles in their quest for United States citizenship. Students can provide free volunteer service in a number of locations throughout the city, helping immigrant seniors to overcome the economic and mobility barriers they experience in meeting their goals. Projects could include language support, preparation for citizenship exams, companionship, etc.
- ✓ Students could work with a local library or senior citizen center to teach senior citizens computer skills.
- ✓ Students plan and develop a “senior citizen prom” in collaboration with a local senior citizen center. Students interview the senior citizens prior to the prom to identify the kinds of music and themes that would be appropriate for the prom.
- ✓ Students interview staff of a senior citizen center to determine a project that would meet the needs of seniors in the building.
- ✓ Students partner with senior citizens to develop an intergenerational writing project and share the project with the school or local community.
- ✓ Students collaborate with a senior citizen center to plan a “physical fitness” day for senior citizens.
- ✓ Students collect oral histories from seniors that correspond to a unit of study in a history class or an English class. Compile the histories and present them at a local library or community organization that serves senior citizens.

# Resources

## Organizations

### **Bethel New Life Adult Day Care**

4950 W. Thomas  
Chicago, IL 60651  
773-473-7870

### **Chicago Department on Aging**

Larry Wallingford, Director of Life Enrichment Programs  
312-744-5779  
Katey Truckley, Director of Volunteer Services  
312-742-6455  
30 N. LaSalle, Suite 2320  
Chicago, IL 60602

### **Chicago Department on Aging Senior Centers**

Central/West Center  
2101 W. Ogden Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60612  
312-746-5300

Northwestern Center  
3160 N. Milwaukee Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60618  
312-744-6681

### **Columbus Park Nursing Home**

901 S. Austin Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60644  
773-287-5959

### **Counseling Center of Lake View - Geriatric Day Program**

Pauline Richter  
1908 W. Montrose Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60618  
773-784-1262

### **Kenwood Healthcare Center**

6125 S. Kenwood Ave  
Chicago, IL 60637  
773-752-6000

### **St. Paul's House & Health Care Center**

Sandra Wulf  
3800 N. California Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60618  
773-478-4222

For more organizations, contact the Service Learning Manager at 3-3425.

## Websites

American Association for Retired Persons  
[www.aarp.org/](http://www.aarp.org/)

Chicago Park District  
[www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com)

Chicago Department on Aging  
[www.ci.chi.il.us/Aging/](http://www.ci.chi.il.us/Aging/)

Gray Panthers  
[www.graypanthers.org](http://www.graypanthers.org)

Illinois Department on Aging  
[www.state.il.us/aging](http://www.state.il.us/aging)

Meals on Wheels Chicago  
[www.mealsonwheelschicago.org](http://www.mealsonwheelschicago.org)

National Senior Citizen's Law Center  
[www.nsclc.org/](http://www.nsclc.org/)

## Classroom Connections

Issues facing senior citizens can easily be incorporated into classroom curriculum. The following are just a few examples.

### **Social Sciences**

- ✓ Examine U.S. policy toward senior citizens
- ✓ Examine voting trends in age demographic groups
- ✓ Examine the role of organizations that support the elderly in the U.S. (i.e., AARP)
- ✓ Examine the role of the elderly in U.S. society and compare it with other countries
- ✓ Conduct oral histories from seniors on various eras in American and world history

### **Economics**

- ✓ Explore the amount of expendable income available to seniors and examine how they might spend it
- ✓ Examine social security and various retirement investment strategies
- ✓ Compare consumption patterns of seniors with other age groups

### **English**

- ✓ Read and discuss poetry, short stories, and novels that include issues of aging
- ✓ Explore various “wisdoms” from different cultures

### **Health Education**

- ✓ Examine various public health issues and how they impact young people and the elderly
- ✓ Research a particular illness that the elderly are at risk of contracting and identify the progress being made to cure it
- ✓ Explore good nutritional practices and compare eating habits of the young and the elderly

### **World Languages**

- ✓ Visit senior citizens who speak another language (Spanish, Polish, etc.) at a center or church and practice language skills with them
- ✓ Ask seniors who speak another language to come and address the class on a particular issue important to the elderly

## State Standards

Academic preparation for a Service Learning project can meet the following Illinois State Standards:

### Social Sciences

- ✓ 14.C.5 Analyze the consequences of participation and non-participation in the electoral process
- ✓ 14.D.5 Interpret public policies and issues from the perspectives of different individuals and groups
- ✓ 15.B.5a Analyze the impact of changes in non-price determinants on consumer demand
- ✓ 15.E.5a Explain how and why government redistributes income in the economy
- ✓ 18.A.5 Compare ways in which social systems are affected by political, environmental, economic, and technological changes
- ✓ 18.B.5 Use methods of social science inquiry to study the development and functions of social systems and report conclusions to a larger audience

### English

- ✓ 2.A.5a Compare and evaluate oral, written or viewed works from various eras and traditions
- ✓ 5.A.5b Research, design and present a project to an academic community audience on a topic selected from among contemporary issues
- ✓ 5.C.5a Using contemporary technology, create a research presentation or prepare a documentary related to academic topics

### Health

- ✓ 20.B.5b Evaluate the effects of fitness choices and heredity on wellness
- ✓ 20.C.5b Understand how aging, illness, and injury affect physical activity
- ✓ 22.A.5a Explain strategies for managing contagious, chronic, and degenerative illnesses
- ✓ 23.C.5 Explain how the aging process affects body systems

### World Languages

- ✓ 28.B.3a Respond to open-ended questions and initiate communication in various situations
- ✓ 28.B.4a Engage in extended conversations in a variety of situations
- ✓ 28.D.5.b Make impromptu presentations in a variety of academic, social, and work situations