

Part I:

Begin with quote – students write a beginning quote in their journal at the beginning of each class and then write a written response about what they think that it means. After about 10 minutes the quote and their responses are discussed as a group.

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do." Edward Everett Hale

Part II:

Ask students to read excerpts from a teacher/leader from the Oakland school district about the challenges that he gives to leaders that take his leadership class. Information was found at the following link. I broke it down – so 10 students could read 10 different sections.

http://www.whatkidscando.org/specialcollections/student_as_allies/pdfs/toughtalk.pdf

Smith on what it means to be a student leader and take responsibility (Excerpts from his speech to Oakland's All-City Council)

Use this opportunity to do something you actually want to do, as opposed to doing something that somebody else has done. Some of you might be in here to help your college applications, some of you guys might be in here because it's a good way of getting out of school for a couple of periods. And that's fine—I have my own views on why missing school isn't the worst thing all the time. But I will say this: Use this opportunity to challenge the school district a little bit, to do things that are a little bit unconventional. Use it to challenge yourself. Use it well. Because there's cats that don't come to these meetings who have great ideas but they're too scared to come and they're not plugged into the system. Then there's cats that come to these meetings because their teachers think they're leaders because they get good grades and keep their mouths shut. Well, that's not leadership either. Getting good grades, keeping your mouth shut, that's not good leadership. Leadership is knowing when to speak and what to say. See, you can speak and have nothing to say. Youth voice—what good is youth voice if you don't have something important to say? "We want youth voice!" "Well all right, what do you want?" "I don't know, man! Oh—you all need to get us cleaner bathrooms!" You all can't clean your own bathrooms? Oh, no! Well, there you go. "We need tutors!" Those who have 2,000 kids that go to your school, can't you all tutor each other? Oh, no, man! All right, so then you start to see that there's a gap, there's a big gap in this leadership issue. It involves understanding what leadership really means and what it really takes. Cleaner bathrooms. Tutors. You can do better than that. ... When you're thinking of why you come here, don't think of why adults come to meetings ("Oh I had a meeting with this person." "Oh, you must have got some things done!" "Yeah, I had a meeting!") In the place you come from, you can't afford to have meetings for the sake of having meetings. You've got to get down to business, plain and simple. And the first thing on your agenda should be the stuff that you all face in school daily. You've got to understand this. Good-meaning folks may come to these All-City Council meetings and tell you how to get engaged in civic action. How to be youth leaders. Conferences, workshops, public speaking skills, etc. Those things are important, okay. But your civic action has got to start on your own campus, with the cats around you who threaten your future every day. Take trespassers. You all got trespassers who didn't graduate from your school, but they come on campus to cause trouble. They can't stay away—even though when they were going to your school, they didn't want to go there. They prey upon you all, and they prey upon each other. Cats get jumped, girls ain't safe, boys ain't safe, teachers ain't safe. I mean, it's crazy. You got to be the student body to get on that. You want better teachers, you say? If you want better teachers, students have got to quit running the good ones away. 'Cause you got good

teachers. But how do you think they feel coming to school only to have some kid cuss them out, threaten them, go through their purse? You got to be the student body to get on that. Cats come to school drunk and high, you gotta do something about it. You can't have cats acting like it's a party. This is a school, man. Sexual harassment, don't be all up on girls and then come here and talk about it! Whether you like it or not, it's on you. Either you cannot take responsibility, and let things go the way they are, and keep complaining—or you can do something about it and try and improve things. But what you don't want to do is have your title, Student Leader, just be an empty title.... There's a quote from Brave heart: "Men don't follow titles, they follow courage." And the one thing you don't see a lot of in Oakland is courage. I never met so many weak knees in my life. It is so sad 'cause they certainly try to dress the part. But a thug ain't nothing but a slave with a weapon. When you're a thug nobody else [at school] is scared of you, really, the only people scared of you are the people in the community. You're only preying on your own folks. That's not real power. Real power is saying no to this intimidation. So there it is. Cats are walking around our schools scared—scared to read, scared to do math, scared to go to class, scared to be good, scared to have courage, scared to shake somebody's hand, scared to smile, scared to get off the drugs, scared to stop dealing drugs, scared to find out that they're really somebody different, scared to find out that their mama was wrong about them when she said they wasn't worth nothing, scared to realize they're turning into their daddy already and they don't want to. It's time to put an end to the fear. It's time to stand up straight, to stand up. It's time to say, "Look, I'm tired of this," and boom, get it together. You all represent, what, 14,000 high schoolers? Do something with it please, all right? Good.

After students read ask them to discuss their thoughts about what this leader said about students in Oakland and how does/can that connect to our school.

Part III:

Ask students to build a list of 10 "I can" statements about things that they can accomplish in their school. Focus the discussion on the little things that can make a big difference – students tend to think that the problem is bigger than they can impact. Our final list had 13.

Here is the list that my students developed:

1. I can pick up trash in the hall if I see it.
2. I can follow the dress code.
3. I can give compliments.
4. I can support all school functions.
5. I can have the courageous conversations.
6. I can practice what I preach.
7. I can stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves.
8. I can be a friend to everyone.
9. I can do what I am asked without rebuttal.
10. I can make other peoples day.
11. I can be the change you wish to see.
12. I can say thank you.
13. I can do all of the above.

Follow-up

Everyone in the class agreed that these are all things that they can do. I ask them each Leadership class which “ I can” statements they have done recently -- these updates lead to some great conversations about how students “feel” when they practice some of these action items. We also created a large poster with these statements that we have hung up in the school commons area.