

1 What's a Good Citizen?

Students will describe rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
(30 - 45 minutes)

Elementary Lesson

1. Conduct a classroom discussion on aspects of good citizenship, such as: obeying rules and laws, helping others, voting in elections, telling an adult if someone is a danger to themselves or others, and being responsible for your own actions and how they affect others.
2. No one is born a good citizen. You learn good citizenship from your family, community, friends, and teachers. Draw a poster showing good citizenship in action.

Middle School Lesson

1. Each student is given a primary source quote discussing citizenship (pp. 12–13).
2. Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Have students share within their group what each of their quotes means.
3. Using their quotes, groups will develop a universal definition of citizenship to be shared with the class.

High School Lesson

1. Each student is given a primary source quote discussing citizenship (pp. 12–13).
2. Students will copy their quote, rewrite it in their own words, and write a brief explanation of the importance of the quote.
3. Each student will compare their quote with five classmates and get a variety of quotes from different eras, races, genders, and nations. Each student will create a universal definition of good citizenship.



Primary Sources

Quotes from notable statesmen, scientists, and artists spanning modern history discuss aspects of citizenship (pp. 12–13).

citizens

members of a nation who have the right to its protection because they were born there or legally pledged their allegiance

citizenship

the privileges and duties that come with being a citizen of a nation

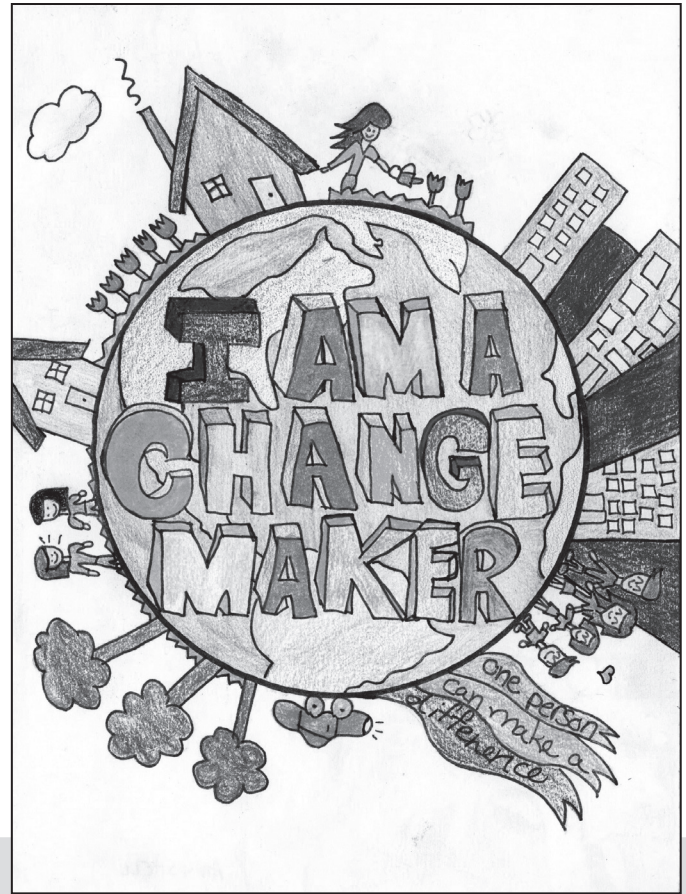
right

a guaranteed benefit or freedom

responsibility

the power to make conscientious and trustworthy decisions

2013 art contest winner ►



Homework

Ask students to discuss with an adult what it means to be a good citizen, and write about their thoughts following the conversation. Here are some questions to discuss:

- What is the most important right of a citizen?
- What is the most important responsibility of a citizen?
- What is one thing you can do to help your community?

Assessment Questions

Elementary: If a responsibility of citizenship is voting, why isn't it required?

Middle & High School (students may choose):

1. Part of citizenship is voting. If non-English speakers become naturalized citizens but are unable to read the ballot, have they been given their full rights as citizens?
2. Have students list and summarize pertinent court cases regarding 18-year-olds gaining suffrage (such as *Oregon v. Mitchell*, 1970). Include historical background regarding why they were granted suffrage and how voting relates to other responsibilities of citizenship 18-year-olds are expected to fulfill.

What's a good citizen?

Quotes for discussion

- 1. The Greek word for idiot, literally translated, means one who does not participate in politics. That sums up my conviction on the subject.**
- Gladys Pyle, U.S. Senator from South Dakota (1890–1989)
- 2. Truth-telling, I have found, is the key to responsible citizenship. The thousands of criminals I have seen in 40 years of law enforcement have had one thing in common: every single one was a liar.**
- J. Edgar Hoover, first director of the FBI (1895–1972)
- 3. Every good citizen makes his country's honor his own, and cherishes it not only as precious but as sacred. He is willing to risk his life in its defense and is conscious that he gains protection while he gives it.**
- Andrew Jackson, 7th U.S. President (1767–1845)
- 4. A generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit the community is a generation that is not learning what it means to be citizens in a democracy.**
- Elizabeth L. Hollander, American author (1817–1885)
- 5. The strength of the Constitution lies entirely in the determination of each citizen to defend it. Only if every single citizen feels duty bound to do his share in this defense are the constitutional rights secure.** - Albert Einstein, German-born American scientist and philosopher (1879–1955)
- 6. It is not the function of our Government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the Government from falling into error.**
- Robert H. Jackson, former U.S. Attorney General (1892–1954)
- 7. Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.**
- George Jean Nathan, American journalist (1882–1958)
- 8. The job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open.**
- Gunter Grass, German poet, novelist, and playwright, 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature (b. 1927)
- 9. As citizens of this democracy, you are the rulers and the ruled, the law-givers and the law-abiding, the beginning and the end.**
- Adlai Stevenson, former Illinois Governor and U.N. Ambassador (1900–1965)
- 10. If I knew something that would serve my country but would harm mankind, I would never reveal it; for I am a citizen of humanity first and by necessity, and a citizen of France second, and only by accident.**
- Charles de Montesquieu, French politician and philosopher (1689–1755)
- 11. The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.**
- Charles de Montesquieu, French politician and philosopher (1689–1755)
- 12. There can be no daily democracy without daily citizenship.**
- Ralph Nader, American lawyer and four-time candidate for U.S. President (b. 1934)
- 13. Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.**
- Margaret Mead, American anthropologist (1901–1978)
- 14. The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his own weight.**
- Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the U.S. (1858–1919)
- 15. We all have an obligation as citizens of this earth to leave the world a healthier, cleaner, and better place for our children and future generations.**
- Blythe Danner, American actress (b. 1943)
- 16. A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.**
- Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian playwright (1828–1906)
- 17. No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.**
- Kofi Annan, Ghanaian diplomat, former Secretary General of the United Nations, and Nobel Peace Prize recipient (b. 1938)

- 18. The government is us; we are the government, you and I.**
- Theodore Roosevelt, 26th U.S. President (1858–1919)
- 19. As global citizens, it is our responsibility to become active participants in our democracy, and to make sure that everyone's civil rights are protected.**
- Robert Alan, American author and social activist (b. 1959)
- 20. Citizenship consists in the service of the country.**
- Jawaharlal Nehru, former Indian Prime Minister (1889–1964)
- 21. It is the duty of every citizen according to his best capacities to give validity to his convictions in political affairs.**
- Albert Einstein, German-born American scientist and philosopher (1879–1955)
- 22. All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.**
- Edmund Burke, British statesman and philosopher (1729–1797)
- 23. The State must follow, and not lead, the character and progress of the citizen.**
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, American philosopher and poet (1803–1882)
- 24. Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.**
- Edward Everett, former U.S. Secretary of State (1794–1865)
- 25. The most important political office is that of the private citizen.** - Louis D. Brandeis, U.S. Supreme Court Justice (1856–1941)
- 26. A passive and ignorant citizenry will never create a sustainable world.**
- Andrew Gaines, philosopher (b. 1938)
- 27. Citizenship is what makes a republic; monarchies can get along without it.**
- Mark Twain, American author (1835–1910)
- 28. It is not always the same thing to be a good man and a good citizen.** - Aristotle, Greek philosopher (384 B.C.–322 B.C.)
- 29. The social and industrial structure of America is founded upon an enlightened citizenship.**
- Bainbridge Colby, former U.S. Secretary of State (1869–1950)
- 30. The measure of your quality as a public person, as a citizen, is the gap between what you do and what you say.**
- Ramsey Clark, former U.S. Attorney General (b. 1927)
- 31. Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.**
- John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. President (1917–1963)
- 32. The future is best decided by ballots, not bullets.**
- Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. President (1911–2004)
- 33. Citizenship is a tough occupation which obliges the citizen to make his own informed opinion and stand by it.**
- Martha Gellhorn, American war correspondent (1908–1998)
- 34. The most important thing an institution does is not to prepare a student for a career but for a life as a citizen.**
- Frank Newman, American civic engagement activist (1927–2004)
- 35. We must work toward the day when citizen service is the common expectation and common experience of every American.** - Bill Clinton, 42nd U.S. President (b. 1946)
- 36. There is much more to being a patriot and a citizen than reciting the pledge or raising a flag.**
- Jesse Ventura, professional wrestler and former Minnesota Governor (b. 1951)
- 37. The American ideal is not that we all agree with each other, or even like each other. It is that we will respect each other's rights, especially the right to be different, and that, at the end of the day, we will understand that we are one people, one country, and one community, and that our well-being is inextricably bound up with the well-being of each and every one of our fellow citizens.**
- C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General (1916–2013)
- 38. Always vote for principle though you may vote alone, and you may cherish the sweetest reflection that your vote is never lost.**
- John Quincy Adams, 6th U.S. President (1767–1848)
- 39. Democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing.**
- Archibald MacLeish, American poet and public official (1892–1982)
- 40. We'd do well to remember that at the end of the day, the law doesn't defend us; we defend the law. And when it becomes contrary to our morals, we have both the right and the responsibility to rebalance it toward just ends.**
- Edward Snowden, American dissident (b. 1983)
- 41. The test of good citizenship is loyalty to country.**
- Bainbridge Colby, American lawyer and former U.S. Secretary of State (1869–1950)