

Summary: Your Role in Government

Rights and Responsibilities

In some countries, people do not have many rights. They can go to jail for giving an opinion. Americans have many rights, such as freedom of speech. The Bill of Rights protects these freedoms.

American citizens must take part in government to make it work well. Adults can participate by voting, paying taxes, and serving on a jury. Citizens can also obey laws and work to change unfair laws.

One way to ask the government to make changes is by writing a petition. Citizens write their ideas in a petition and ask others to read it. People who agree with these ideas sign the petition. After many people sign the petition, citizens give it to the government. Sometimes, petitions result in new laws.

Children can participate in government by obeying laws, going to school, and volunteering in the community. Children can also give their opinion by writing to newspapers and government leaders. All citizens have a responsibility to respect other people and their rights.

Why We Vote

In 1787, the founders of our country wrote the Constitution. They did not want a dictatorship. They made the United States a democracy. In a democracy, people have the power to choose their leaders. In the United States, people vote for representatives who share their ideas. Then, these representatives make laws and decisions for the nation.

Voting is one of the most important right of citizens. It is also a responsibility. When our nation began, only white men could vote. Women, African Americans, and American Indians worked for years to win the right to vote. Today, all citizens over 18 have the right to vote.

The presidential election of 2000 showed how everyone's vote matters. In that election, just a few hundred votes in Florida decided who became president. The election was so close that the votes had to be counted many times. Finally, the Supreme Court agreed that George W. Bush had the most votes. He became President of the United States.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

jury *noun*, a group of citizens who decide a case in court

dictatorship *noun*, a form of government in which one ruler makes all the decisions for a country

democracy *noun*, a form of government in which power belongs to the people



After You Read

REVIEW In what ways can people participate in government? Highlight two sentences that tell how adult citizens can participate. Underline two sentences that tell how children can participate.

REVIEW In a democracy, what power belongs to the people? Underline the sentence that tells the answer.