

Summary: Democracy and Citizenship

Citizenship

A citizen is an official member of a country. Anyone born in the United States is a citizen of the United States.

Immigrants can become citizens through naturalization.

Citizens of the United States have a voice in government.

They have many rights protected by laws. Citizens have the right to vote. At 18, a citizen can register to vote. Voting allows citizens to choose leaders and make decisions in their communities. Citizens can also run for political office.

People in this country worked to gain their civil rights. After the Civil War, African Americans gained citizenship and the right to vote. In 1920, women won the right to vote. In 1924, American Indians finally gained citizenship. These changes made the United States a more complete democracy.

Responsibilities of Citizens

Citizens of the United States have rights and responsibilities.

Obeying the law is a responsibility. Laws create a safer community. Paying taxes is a responsibility. Taxes help pay for fire departments, roads, and public parks. It is a citizen's responsibility to serve on juries in law courts and vote in elections. Men who are 18 and older must sign up for the military draft. Citizens also have a responsibility to take action to change things for the better. Good citizens get involved in their communities. They speak out against injustice.

Young people also have responsibilities as citizens. They must go to school. Even before they can vote, young people can take part in democracy by learning about things that are important to them. They can help protect the environment or change unfair laws by writing letters to lawmakers or newspapers. They can sign petitions or join protests. Young people can volunteer to help others and make their communities better places to live. Our democracy depends on its citizens. They should vote, obey laws, and take an active role in their communities.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

naturalization *noun*, the legal process of learning the laws, rights, and duties of being a citizen and passing a citizenship test

register *verb*, sign up

responsibility *noun*, a duty that someone is expected to fulfill

volunteer *noun*, a person who helps other people without being paid



After You Read

REVIEW **At what age can citizens vote?** Circle the number that tells how old you must be to vote.

REVIEW **What are the responsibilities of United States citizens?** Underline responsibilities of citizens.