

Exploring the Duties & Responsibilities of a Citizen

Overview

This lesson is meant to be an introduction and/or reflection regarding the duties and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. Students will reflect on what it means to be a model citizen and create a pamphlet entitled “How to be an Active Citizen.”

Grades

Middle & high

Materials

- Senator Obama’s Speech Excerpted from the June 4, 2005 Knox College Commencement Address, attached
- How to be an Active Citizen, assignment sheet attached
- Art paper, markers/colored pencils

Duration

- 30-45 minutes for initial discussion, reading and description of project
- Additional class time can optionally be provided for working on project and/or presenting final pamphlets

Procedure

What Does It Mean to Be an Active, Responsible Citizen?

1. As a warm-up, ask students to consider what it means to be an active citizen. Instruct students to ponder and write down some preliminary thoughts for a few minutes. Next, instruct students to partner and share their thoughts with one another for 2-3 minutes. Finally, have partners report their thoughts back to class, recording ideas on chart paper for students to see. Further discuss:
 - What are additional characteristics of an active, responsible citizen? (Continue adding thoughts to the student brainstorm list)
 - Which of these comments on our list refer to the duties of citizens? The responsibilities of citizens? What additional duties and responsibilities do you believe citizens have that are not yet on this list? (As students note these, classify/differentiate them on the paper with some type of symbol.)
 - What responsibilities does the individual have to the community and the community to the individual?
 - In your opinion, what is a citizen’s responsibility in terms of education? Is there a need for additional citizenship education beyond high school? Explain.
 - Reviewing the list we’ve created, what would our society be like if citizens were not active and responsible? How would communities be impacted if citizens refused to fulfill their responsibilities? (For example, what effect might an uninformed voter have on the election process?)

- In your opinion, are most citizens fulfilling their responsibilities in today's society? Explain. (Discuss this in terms of teenagers/young adults and adults.)
2. Next, ask students to identify things/actions that are required of citizens. Teachers should facilitate a discussion that highlights how some citizen requirements are mandated by law, while others are not. For example, a citizen may be fined or jailed for missing jury duty, but there is no penalty for not voting.

President Obama Challenges Young Citizens

3. Tell students they are going to explore the concept of active citizenship further by reading an excerpt from a speech President Barack Obama gave in 2005 to graduating college students. Give students the attached handout to read (individually or out loud as a class) then discuss:
- Obama opens by saying that "America is a land of big dreamers and big hopes." What do you think he means? What examples can you cite as evidence of this?
 - According to Obama, what do we all need to do to "give every American a fighting chance in the 21st century"? Do you agree that this is what it will take? Explain.
 - What does Obama mean by "poverty of ambition?"
 - Are citizens responsible for taking up "the challenges that we face as a nation and make them your own..."? Explain.
 - The quote found on the Great Seal of the United States is, "E pluribus unum", which means "Out of Many, One," How does this relate to Obama's message regarding individual salvation?
 - What examples of active citizenship does Obama note?
 - Can one person make a difference? Explain.
 - According to Obama, what connects us?
 - What is the purpose of Obama's speech? What is he encouraging the new college graduates to do?
 - If Barack Obama was asked what he feels are the characteristics of an active, responsible citizen, how do you think he would respond?

Create a Pamphlet – "How to be an Active Citizen"

4. Explain to students that they will continue exploring citizenship and the responsibilities of such by creating a pamphlet to inspire and teach people how to be model United States' citizens. Pass out the attached assignment sheet and go over the directions with students. Tell students to imagine they have to present this pamphlet to a student from another country. What would they want this student to know about being an active citizen in America? Teachers should determine how much class time and/or homework time to allow for pamphlet completion.
5. Collect pamphlets at the beginning of class the next day and display them around the classroom. Teachers can alternatively have students trade pamphlets and evaluate one another's work, discussing:
- What did you like about the pamphlet(s) you reviewed? What did you learn about active citizenship from the pamphlet(s)?
 - What questions do you have that you feel the pamphlet did not address? What could be expanded/improved?

- If you could show such a pamphlet to one person, who would you show and why? (Meaning, who most needs to learn about active citizenship and why?)
6. Culminate this lesson by having students reflect upon their initial brainstormed thoughts (from step #1):
 - When considering all of the characteristics and responsibilities of citizens, which do you think is the most important and why?
 7. Teachers can alternatively end with students returning to their initial brainstorm to vote on this question.
Give each student a sticker dot to place beside the word/phrase on their brainstormed list that they feel is most important. Discuss the results once all students have voted.

Senator Obama's Speech Excerpted from the June 4, 2005 Knox College Commencement Address

America is a land of big dreamers and big hopes. It is this hope that has sustained us through revolution and civil war, depression and world war, a struggle for civil and social rights and the brink of nuclear crisis. And it is because our dreamers dreamed that we have emerged from each challenge more united, more prosperous, and more admired than before.

So let's dream. Instead of doing nothing or simply defending 20th century solutions, let's imagine together what we could do to give every American a fighting chance in the 21st century. . .

All of that is possible but none of it will come easy. Every one of us is going to have to work more, read more, train more, think more. We will have to slough off some bad habits—like driving gas guzzlers that weaken our economy and feed our enemies abroad. Our children will have to turn off the TV set once in a while and put away the video games and start hitting the books. We'll have to reform institutions, like our public schools, that were designed for an earlier time. Republicans will have to recognize our collective responsibilities, even as Democrats recognize that we have to do more than just defend old programs.

It won't be easy, but it can be done. It can be our future. We have the talent and the resources and brainpower. But now we need the political will. We need a national commitment.

And we need each of you.

Now, no one can force you to meet these challenges. If you want, it will be pretty easy for you to leave here today and not give another thought to towns like Galesburg and the challenges they face. There is no community service requirement in the real world; no one is forcing you to care. You can take your diploma, walk off this stage, and go chasing after the big house, and the nice suits, and all the other things that our money culture says that you should want, that you should aspire to, that you can buy.

But I hope you don't walk away from the challenge. Focusing your life solely on making a buck shows a certain poverty of ambition. It asks too little of yourself. You need to take up the challenges that we face as a nation and make them your own. Not because you have a debt to those who helped you get here, although you do have that debt. Not because you have an obligation to those who are less fortunate than you, although I do think you do have that obligation. It's primarily because you have an obligation to yourself. Because individual salvation has always depended on collective salvation. Because it's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you realize your true potential.

And I know that all of you are wondering how you'll do this, the challenges seem so big. They seem so difficult for one person to make a difference.

But we know it can be done. Because where you're sitting, in this very place, in this town, it's happened before.

Nearly two centuries ago, before civil rights, before voting rights, before Abraham Lincoln, before the Civil War, before all of that, America was stained by the sin of slavery. In the sweltering heat of southern plantations, men and women who looked like me could not escape the life of pain and servitude in which they were sold. And yet, year after year, as this moral cancer ate away at the American ideals of liberty and equality, the nation was silent.

But its people didn't stay silent for long.

One by one, abolitionists emerged to tell their fellow Americans that this would not be our place in history — that this was not the America that had captured the imagination of the world.

This resistance that they met was fierce, and some paid with their lives. But they would not be deterred, and they soon spread out across the country to fight for their cause. One man from New York went west, all the way to the prairies of Illinois to start a colony.

And here in Galesburg, freedom found a home. Here in Galesburg, the main depot for the Underground Railroad in Illinois, escaped slaves could roam freely on the streets and take shelter in people's homes. And when their masters or the police would come for them, the people of this town would help them escape north, some literally carrying them in their arms to freedom.

Think about the risks that involved. If they were caught abetting a fugitive, you could've been jailed or lynched. It would have been simple for these townspeople to turn the other way; to go live their lives in a private peace.

And yet, they didn't do that. Why?

Because they knew that we were all Americans; that we were all brothers and sisters; the same reason that a century later, young men and women your age would take Freedom Rides down south, to work for the Civil Rights movement. The same reason that black women would walk instead of ride a bus after a long day of doing somebody else's laundry and cleaning somebody else's kitchen. Because they were marching for freedom.

Today, on this day of possibility, we stand in the shadow of a lanky, raw-boned man with little formal education who once took the stage at Old Main and told the nation that if anyone

did not believe the American principles of freedom and equality, that those principles were timeless and all-inclusive, they should go rip that page out of the Declaration of Independence.

My hope for all of you is that as you leave here today, you decide to keep these principles alive in your own life and in the life of this country. You will be tested. You won't always succeed. But know that you have it within your power to try. That generations who have come before you faced these same fears and uncertainties in their own time. And that through our collective labor, and through God's providence, and our willingness to shoulder each other's burdens, America will continue on its precious journey towards that distant horizon, and a better day.

Text of Senator Obama's speech excerpted from the June 4, 2005, Knox College Commencement Address, reprinted on the college website, . <http://www.knox.edu/x9803.xml>.



Name: _____

Assignment: How to be an Active Citizen Pamphlet

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” ~ John F. Kennedy

Design a pamphlet that explains various ways to be an active, responsible citizen as well as encouragement for pamphlet readers to be active, responsible citizens. By reading your pamphlet, a person should be educated on what is expected of them as a citizen as well as inspired to be a model, active citizen.

You may use outside resources for information and ideas, such as your textbook, the internet, etc. Organize your thoughts on a separate sheet of paper before you begin your pamphlet. Your final pamphlet must include:

- 1. Citizen Legal Duties** - As a citizen, there are certain things you are required to do. These things are known as legal duties. Legal duties include:
 - Serving jury duty
 - Obeying the law
 - Attending school
 - Paying TaxesYou should describe and explain these 4 legal duties. Your description should be at least 3 sentences for each duty and include why each is important.
- 2. Civic Responsibilities** - Responsibilities are things you should do, but do not have to do. U.S. citizens have 4 civic responsibilities.
 - Voting
 - Being Informed
 - Respecting and protecting other’s rights
 - Helping the communityYou should describe and explain each of these responsibilities in at least 5 sentences and include your opinion regarding the responsibility’s importance, ways in which a citizen may meet this responsibility, examples, convincing arguments that will make pamphlet readers want to exercise this responsibility, quotes, etc.
- 3. Volunteering** - Explain what volunteering is and why we should volunteer. What are the benefits to both the volunteer and the community? Give at least 3 reasons why individuals should volunteer. Name at least 5 places/ways that individuals can volunteer.
- 4. Quotation** – Your pamphlet should include at least one quote from a politician on the topic of active citizenship, citizen responsibility, or related topics. The quote should be one that you agree with.
- 5. Artistic Creativity** - Your pamphlet should be artistically created on unlined paper. It should have an attractive cover with a title and use at least 3 drawings/graphics throughout the pamphlet. Text in the pamphlet can be typed or neatly printed. Pamphlets can be a bi-fold or tri-fold. Be creative but accurate in the information you present (creative techniques such as poetry, art, etc. are great ways to make your pamphlet unique and inspiring). Final pamphlets should be neat, organized, appealing and interesting to the reader, and should contain no grammatical mistakes.

This project is worth _____ points.

Due date: _____