

What Kind of Citizen Are You?

Overview

In this activity, participants will explore the definition of a citizen, as well as the traits ideal and negative citizens possess. They will then discuss the responsibilities of citizens in depth by participating in an acting exercise and discussing the themes illustrated in the scenes. Ideally, this activity will culminate with a volunteer event or service learning project.

Grades

K-9 (Part I)

5 + (Part II)

Activity Type

Small Groups

Partner

Whole Group

Materials

- A large strip of paper (bulletin board or butcher paper)
- Markers
- Citizen Role Plays and Discussion Questions (attached)

Duration

1+ hour

Instructions

Part I: The Ideal Citizen

1. Lead group members in a verbal brainstorm of the word *citizen*. Encourage them to explore all aspects of the word that comes to mind. As a group, create a common definition.

***Teacher Note:** Teachers are encouraged to facilitate the creation of a definition that is inclusive of all students, regardless of their nationality or immigrant status. For the purposes of this activity, “citizen” is to mean one who lives in and contributes to their community. Teachers can also choose to change the word “citizen” throughout this activity to “community member.”

2. Ask participants to silently think of what it means to be an *ideal citizen*. What types of thoughts, traits, characteristics, behaviors, actions, ideas, values, etc. would an ideal citizen have?

Encourage their thinking by asking:

- What type of person makes a community a good place to live and work?
- How would an ideal community member act and behave? What might they think and value?
- How would an ideal community member affect where you live (your neighborhood)? Your school? The places you go to for fun?

3. While students think, direct their attention to a large piece of paper lying on the floor. The paper should be large enough to contain the outline of a young person, which you should draw out before beginning this activity. Make the outline as large as possible and title it, *The Ideal Citizen*. (If your group is larger, you may divide participants up into smaller groups, with paper and a human outline for each group.)
4. Explain to participants that they are going to imagine the ideal, “perfect” citizen by filling up the inside of the person’s outline with all the traits an ideal citizen would encompass. They may write words, draw pictures, use symbols, etc. Allow students to begin, monitoring their work as they write and draw on the inside of this human outline. As they work, continue to ask questions to facilitate further thinking and details. (For example, if a participant has written “respectful”, ask the group to consider what respect means, and instruct them to add those specifics into their citizen).
5. Once finished, ask the group to step back and view their “ideal citizen.” Instruct them to point out the attributes that they believe are most important and explain why. See if the group can come to a consensus on the top 5 traits an ideal citizen should have.
6. Next, following the same process as above, instruct students to consider a negative citizen, and what thoughts, traits, characteristics, behaviors, actions, ideas, values, etc. this person would encompass. Have students return to the large paper, and write words, pictures, symbols, etc. on the outside of the human drawing that represent a negative/bad citizen.
7. Once finished, discuss:
 - Looking at everything on the outside of our citizen, which comment, symbol, picture, etc. represents what you believe to be the most negative or damaging part of a bad citizen and why?
 - What do you think determines whether a person becomes an ideal citizen or a citizen who has a negative impact on our community?
 - Can an ideal citizen sometimes make mistakes? If we make a mistake, does that mean we should be considered a negative citizen? (Discuss with students how all people make mistakes and we certainly shouldn’t be defined by such mistakes. If we recognize when we make a mistake and try to make up for it, or try to keep from making it again, we are still working towards being the “ideal”.
 - Why do you think it is important to be an active, responsible citizen? What consequences might we face if our community fills with citizens acting negatively?
 - How might we encourage fellow community members to be “ideal citizens?”

Part II: Evaluating Citizen Actions

8. Explain to participants that they will partner up and receive a role play (see attached) to act out in front of the group. The rest of the group will watch the role play, and determine whether they saw the traits of an active, responsible citizen, or a citizen who needs some improvement. Allow participants 5 minutes to practice their role play several times. Explain to students they do not have to memorize the lines and that the lines do not have to be exact when they act out the scene.

The most important thing is that the gist of the scene is the same, even if the lines change. Allow students the creative freedom to create props and set up the scene as they wish.

9. Review the expectations of respectful audience members with your group and then allow partners to perform their role plays in front of the whole group. After the performance, the scene becomes a jumping off point for what can become deep and meaningful discussions. Use the questions underneath each role play as a discussion guide once the scene is complete. Leaders may decide to edit questions and/or allow the discussions to go in the direction students take them. It is also a leader's choice whether to use all of the scenes or just scenes addressing particular themes you wish your group to learn about and discuss. Scenes do not have to be performed in the order they are written.
10. Upon completion of the role plays and discussions have the group reflect by asking:
 - What kind of citizen are you? Thinking about what we saw and discussed today, and comparing those ideas to your own beliefs and actions, would you consider yourself an "ideal citizen", or someone who is working towards becoming an "ideal citizen"? Why or why not?
 - How might you improve your traits as a citizen to become more ideal?
 - Are some of the issues that were portrayed in the scenes issues that come up in our school or community? Explain.
 - As positive leaders, what can we do as individuals to show our community that we are working on being ideal citizens?
 - What could we do as a group to show others that we mean to impact our community in a positive way as ideal citizens?

Follow Up Activities

Place students in groups and have them brainstorm a list of issues in their school and/or community at large that need addressing. (See the Consortium's "Windows to My Community" for an activity to guide students through this process.)

Based on student responses and ideas, allow students to vote on a project they would like to complete, with the goal of being ideal citizens who help someone/something in their school and/or community.

Citizen Role Plays and Discussion Questions

Cut out the following boxes and assign one role play per partner. Give participants 5 minutes to practice their role play and become comfortable with it. When it is time to perform, review the expectations of being a respectful audience member, then allow partners to volunteer and share their role play. After each group, refer to the questions underneath and discuss with the entire group.

Role Play #1: Voting

A: Hey, it's Election Day! I'm going to vote. Do you want to come?

B: Man, no way. I'm going to play some basket ball. I don't have any time for that mess.

A: Are you sure? Voting is really important. If you don't vote, you don't have a say in the decisions the government makes for us.

B: So what? One vote won't make a difference. Besides, I don't know anything about any of those politicians.

After role play #1 discuss:

- Characterize the two citizens you saw in this scene. Were they ideal or not? Explain.
- Why did character B not care to vote? Do you feel that this is a common belief? Why?
- What could Person A have said to try and convince Person B to vote? Whose responsibility is it to educate Person B on the importance of voting, or to convince him/her to vote?

Role Play #2: Petitions

A: Hello. Could I have a moment of your time?

B: Sure.

A: I'm trying to collect signatures on this petition for doing away with our school's dress code. I feel like it is a restriction on a student's ability to be unique, and some people aren't comfortable in the style of the uniform. Would you sign this petition supporting our cause?

B: I can do that. I agree, those wool skirts are really uncomfortable. Good luck with your petition!

After role play #2 discuss:

- Characterize the two citizens you saw in this scene. Were they ideal or not? Explain.
- How might Person A's participation bring about change to the school dress code? What are other ways he/she could also try and change the dress code?

Role Play #3: Volunteering

A: So get this...Chris won't come with us to the mall, because he says he's going to that gross homeless shelter to serve food. Can you believe that? I mean, what's his deal not wanting to hang out with us?

B: I have no idea. I know I'm not spending my time feeding those people when I could be shopping. Let's just go.

After role play #3 discuss:

- Characterize the two citizens you saw in this scene. Were they ideal or not? Explain.
- Why is volunteering important?
- Why do you think some people choose to volunteer? Why do others choose not to volunteer?
- What is our responsibility in terms of those less fortunate living in our communities?
- What are some places in our own community that offer services to those less fortunate, or places where we could volunteer?
- In this scene, someone is going to volunteer at a homeless shelter. How do some members of our communities end up in less fortunate situations and in need of services such as the ones we just brainstormed? (*The group leader should facilitate answers so that myths are dispelled, such as “Homeless people just don’t want to work.”)

Role Play #4: Citizen Responsibility

A: You won’t believe this! I just saw someone get mugged outside in the parking lot!

B: You did? What happened?

A: I was looking out the window and I saw these guys jump this other guy and take his back pack.

B: What did you do?

A: Nothing! I’m not getting involved in all that drama.

After role play #4 discuss:

- Evaluate the citizenship characteristics of Person A. Were they ideal or not?
- What other choices could Person A have made, other than “not getting involved”? (*The facilitator should make sure participants understand that they should never put themselves in danger in a situation like this; rather, they should call the police or go for help.)
- What about the person who robbed the citizen in the parking lot. How would you characterize this citizen? What causes some members of our community to make bad choices such as this?
- As a community of involved citizens, what are some steps we can take to protect our neighborhoods and communities?

Role Play #5: Participation in Local Government

A: I can't believe how out of date our text books are! I really think this is ridiculous. The students hate them, and it's impossible to teach out of them. They're awful!

B: There is a school board meeting tonight. Why don't we go and get on the list to speak about text book adoption? We could explain the situation to the board, and ask them to upgrade our books.

A: No, Oprah comes on at 4:00PM. I don't ever miss Oprah.

After role play #5 discuss:

- Characterize the two citizens you saw in this scene. Were they ideal or not? Explain.
- Why do you think citizens choose to do things like watching TV over participating in their local governmental meetings?
- What could Person B have said to Person A to try and convince him/her of the importance of missing Oprah and going to the school board meeting?

Role Play #6: Bullying

A: Hey, did you hear about Jackie Smith today in the cafeteria? She slipped on those cheap shoes of hers and fell down. Her lunch spilled all over her tacky polyester clothes! It was hilarious!

B: Are you serious? I can't believe I missed that! I would have loved to see her look that stupid. How embarrassing!

After role play #6 discuss:

- How would you describe the two people in this scene?
- Do things like this happen at your school? Do people tease, gossip about, or bully others? Why do you think some people choose to do this? How do you think it makes those being mistreated feel?
- Is the way you treat people part of being an "ideal citizen"? Explain.
- Why is it important to strive to form a safe school community, where teasing, bullying, gossiping, fighting, etc. is not tolerated? If these types of things happen at your school, what can you do to try and change the atmosphere? (The facilitator is looking for answers such as "Make sure I'm not doing it", "don't become part of the problem", "Let people know I'm not ok with teasing others", "Talk to teachers about it", etc.)

Role #7: Attending School

A: Hey, are you coming to the bus stop with me? If you don't hurry, you'll miss the bus and get to first period late.

B: Whatever, I'm not going.

A: Why not?

B: I just don't want to. School is stupid, and my parents don't care if I go anyway.

After role play #7 discuss:

- Why is it important to attend school, regardless of whether you want to or whether someone makes you?
- Why is attending school part of your responsibility as a citizen? (*You are looking for answers involving the fact that school is where we often learn civic responsibility, it's where we are educated, it's where we become literate, etc.)
- Discuss how all of these are crucial to the health of a democratic society.
- Why do you think that even though we've agreed on its importance, some students choose to drop out of school? Why is this dangerous to our society?

Role Play #8: Priorities

A: What are you up to this Saturday?

B: I'm going to Pleasant Valley Community Center. A group of us noticed that the yard in front is looking rough, so we are going to help them landscape it. We raised money to buy new flowers and everything!

A: That sounds like hard work.

B: It kind of is, but it's going to look so much nicer, and it will improve our community. Just think of how many more people will notice how nice the center looks, and maybe be more likely to go in and use the services, or volunteer to help out.

A: Ok, I was going to the movies on Saturday, but I think I can help out.

After role play #8 discuss:

- Characterize the two citizens you saw in this scene. Were they ideal or not? Explain.
- We discussed earlier why volunteering is important. How do you think these two people will feel about themselves and their community after volunteering?

Role Play #9: Gangs

A: Hey man, I'm going to hang out with my boys at the mall. Why don't you come along? If you are with us, everyone out their hanging out will look at you with some serious respect.

B: Aren't those guys in a gang? Are you sure you should be hanging out with them?

A: Are you kidding? If I go through the initiation, they are going to let me join. Why wouldn't I want to do that? They take care of me, they have my back, they even have some ways to help me make some money. No one messes with us. You should think about joining too.

B: What do you have to do to join?

A: Nothing much...just steal some stuff.

B: I don't know man. I'll think about it.

After role play #9 discuss:

- Is this scenario realistic? Do young people join gangs? Why do you think they do this?
- What are the negative consequences of being a gang member? What are the negative effects of gangs on our communities?
- What are some things we can do as a community to help keep young people out of gangs and to prevent violence?

Role Play #10: Making a Difference

A: I cannot believe everyone is fighting about whether or not to build the skate park here. I think it would be awesome. It would give us a place to hang out, and a safe place to skate. It isn't fair.

B: Isn't there a City Council meeting about it? I heard that people can sign up to speak. Why don't you go and tell them how you feel?

A: Why would I waste my time? One person can't make a difference. Besides, I'm too young. They would never listen to what I have to say.

After role play #10 discuss:

- Do young people sometimes feel like the person in this scene ("one person can't make a difference", "they would never listen to what I have to say because I'm young")? Why do people your age sometimes feel this way?
- What if all citizens thought that they couldn't make a difference, and thus didn't make their opinions known to their governments? How might this impact our society?
- Can one person make a difference? Explain. (allow students to express their honest opinions, but encourage them to see examples of how people can make a difference individually, and by encouraging others to stand behind them; for example, skate parks in Chapel Hill and Cary were constructed largely due to young people attending City Council meetings and advocating for their wishes)
- What types of things can you do as a young person to "make a difference" in your local governments, in your communities, in your schools, etc.? Why is it important to at least attempt to "make a difference"?

Role Play #11: Drug Use

A: Hey, what are you doing after school?

B: I'm not sure. Why?

A: Don't tell anybody, but my brother said he's got some strong stuff I can try. He said I can bring you too.

B: What do you mean by "strong stuff"?

A: I mean drugs. We can try something we've never done before. Just think about what everyone at school will say when they here we had the nerve to do it. You aren't scared are you?

B: No, I'm not scared. I'll meet you after school.

After role play #11 discuss:

- Why do you think some young people try drugs?
- What consequences might you face by just "trying" drugs?
- What choices did Person B have in this scene, other than agreeing to meet his/her friend after school? What choice would a good citizen make? Why might it be hard to make the choice of a good citizen, and decline a friend?

Role Play #12: Generosity

A: Hi there. My name is _____. I noticed that you started school here last week. Would you like to sit with me and have your lunch?

B: That's ok. You don't have to sit with me. I'm ok sitting by myself.

A: Why don't you come over to our table? I can introduce you to all of my friends. I'm sure it's hard being the new kid. I bet you miss your old school.

B: I really do. It's hard to move somewhere and not know anybody. It's pretty lonely. I would like to sit with you if you are sure it's ok.

A: Absolutely! Come on, I know everyone is going to love meeting you!

After role play #12 discuss:

- How would you characterize what person A did? What type of citizen was he/she being?
- How do you think person B felt before A came over? What can be difficult about being new in a school?
- Are there people who you think feel lonely at our school, even if they have gone here for years? Why might those people be lonely?
- In what ways can we extend our generosity and kindness and make them feel more welcome and included?
- Why is it important to be kind to other students, even if they aren't your friends? How might teasing or feeling "left out" effect our fellow classmates?
- How does it make you feel when you know you've made someone's day better, or helped them, or made them smile? (discuss the fact that it feels good to help others!)