



What Makes a Good Citizen?

Overview

Following a brainstorm on what makes a good citizen, students analyze characters from literature to determine why they are good citizens. They then prepare a page for an alphabet book highlighting a characteristic of good citizens and illustrating how the character in their story showed that characteristic. Students will thus identify ways in which citizens contribute to the common good and will understand what it means to be an active, engaged citizen.

Grades

2-6

Activity Type

Individual, Partner, or Group

Materials

- Citizenship themed books, recommendations attached
- What Makes a Good Citizen, handout attached
- Art Supplies

Duration

1+ hour(s)

Procedure

1. Open the lesson by writing the following question up front: What makes a good citizen? Brainstorm with students the characteristics of a good citizen or actions that they think a good citizen would take. Post their answers on the board or on chart paper. Decide upon a group definition, such as, "A good citizen works for the common good and to protect and improve our democracy."
2. Tell students they will be reading several books. While reading, they are going to think about what characters in the books, if any, are good citizens. Depending on the age and reading skills of your students, you may want to have small groups of students read different books or you may want to read several of the books aloud to the class and then organize the students into response groups, assigning one book to each group. Distribute the *What Makes a Good Citizen* handout to the groups and ask them to pick a character from the book who they think represents a good citizen. They should then use the handout to analyze why he/she was a good citizen. Allow time for groups to complete their handouts.
3. Next, tell students that they are going to make pages for a big alphabet book about citizenship. If you are working with 4-6 graders, tell them the alphabet books will be provided to younger students to help them learn about the alphabet and citizenship. Each page of the book will represent one letter and show one characteristic of a good citizen (such as H is for honesty or R is for responsibility) or something that citizens do (such as V is for voting or H is for helping others). The characteristic or action chosen will be based on the letter assigned to the student. Students will decorate the page with their assigned letter, the citizenship word it begins, and an illustration and description about how this work relates to citizenship. For example, if a student is assigned the letter A, he/she may choose to illustrate "Action", describing how citizens should be active members of society and drawing pictures that show examples of this. Provide markers or crayons and large sheets of art paper to the groups and allow time for them to create their pages.
4. Once students are finished, display the pages around the room before compiling them into the book. Allow time for students to circulate around the room and look at the pages displayed. Encourage students to note what they like about the various pages, and lead a positive feedback session in which students compliment each other's work.
5. Finally, return to the brainstormed list that students created at the beginning of the activity, asking students to consider how some of the ideas have been further developed through the discussions and the book pages. Ask students if they would they add anything to their list or take anything off.

Culminating Activities

- Have students use the experiences from this lesson to create a picture illustrating the “Model Citizen.” The model might be created from the parts of characters in the stories; for example, a group might want their “Model Citizen” to have the heart of Ruby Bridges, the gentle hands of the barber who cleaned the willow tree loon, the feet of the marchers in the civil rights movement, and so on.
- Continue exploring citizenship via role plays; see the lesson “The Good, The Bad, and the Citizen”
- Become active citizens by volunteering! See the Consortium’s lesson “Windows to My Community”.

Resources

For information about VOICE and the Constitutional Rights Foundation, go to www.crf-usa.org .



What Makes a Good Citizen?

Some experts say a good citizen is a person who works for the common good and tries to protect and improve our democracy. Think about the characters in your book. Were any of them good citizens?

1. With your group, pick a character from your book who your group members think was a good citizen. You will probably have to spend time talking about different characters before you decide. After discussing write down which character you picked:
2. List some things that this person did to promote the common good. That means they did something to make life better for all people, not just themselves.
3. List some things this person did to protect or improve our democracy. That means they did things to make our country better.
4. Did the person do anything that a good citizen would not do? If so, list those things here.
5. Using what you have written above, write one or two sentences explaining why you think this character was a good citizen.



Book Recommendations Relating to Citizenship

Grades 2-3:

- *Just a Dream*, by Chris Van Allsburg (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990). Young Walter is careless, littering and refusing to sort the trash for recycling. When he dreams about a future created by actions like his own, he decides to act responsibly.
- *Now One Foot, Now the Other*, by Tomie de Paola (New York: Putnam's, 1981). When Bobby's grandfather has a stroke that leaves him incapacitated, Bobby is scared at first but eventually takes responsibility for helping his grandfather.
- *Washing the Willow Tree Loon*, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Ordinary citizens work together to rescue birds caught in an oil spill.
- *A Day's Work*, by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ronald Himler (New York: Clarion Books, 1994). Young Francisco finds work for himself and his grandfather, but the work involves gardening, something they know nothing about. After a long day of work, they discover they have pulled up the plants instead of the weeds. When his grandfather insists that they correct the mistake, Francisco gets a lesson in important values.
- *City Green*, by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (New York: Morrow, 1994). An urban community creates a neighborhood garden.
- *Jamaica Louise James*, by Amy Hest, illustrated by Sheila White Samton (Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 1996). To cheer up her grandmother, Jamaica paints posters to hang in the subway station. The result is a place where everyone is friendlier and happier.
- *Mrs. Katz and Tush*, by Patricia Polacco (New York: Bantam Books, 1992). Larnel, a young African American boy, befriends elderly Mrs. Katz, learns about the struggles of her people (Polish Jews), and gains a lifelong friend.
- *Pearl Moscowitz's Last Stand*, by Arthur A. Levine, illustrated by Robert Roth (New York: Tambourine Books, 1993). Pearl has lived on Ginkgo Street all her life. While she has enjoyed watching the neighborhood change, she becomes an activist when a man from the power company comes to cut down the last ginkgo tree.
- *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*, by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (New York: Morrow, 1991). A young boy who is afraid of homeless people gains a new perspective when he helps his uncle work at the soup kitchen.
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, by Robert Coles (New York: Scholastic, 1995). Ruby Bridges was just a little girl when she became one of the first students to integrate New Orleans' public schools, but her courage and dignity amaze and inspire the reader.
- *Sato and the Elephants*, by Juanita Havill and Jean and Mou-sien Tseng (New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1993). A carver of ivory one day discovers a bullet embedded in the piece he is carving; realizing an elephant died to supply his materials, he decides to become a carver of stone instead.

Grades 4-6:

- *The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate*, by Janice Cohn, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth (Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 1995). When a rock crashes through the window of a Jewish family's home in Billings, Montana, they decide to inform the community about what happened. Christian ministers, community leaders, and friends of the family decide to take action to show that they oppose such hate crimes.
- *Teammates*, by Peter Golenbock, illustrated by Paul Bacon (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990). This book tells the story of how Jackie Robinson came to be the first African American player in Major League Baseball. The book also highlights the actions of Peeewe Reese, who stuck up for Robinson when others heaped abuse on him.
- *A Long Way to Go*, by Zibby O'Neal, illustrated by Michael Dooling (New York: Puffin Books, 1990). Young Lila must struggle with her parents' and brothers' restricted views of what girls can do while learning about her grandmother's efforts on behalf of women's suffrage. The importance of the right to vote is conveyed in an interesting story.
- *Come Back Salmon: How a Group of Dedicated Kids Adopted Pigeon Creek and Brought It Back to Life*, by Molly Cone (Sierra Club, 1992). The subtitle says it all.
- *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Stories*, edited by Ellen Levine (New York: Avon, 1994). Editor Levine presents powerful excerpts from interviews with 30 African Americans who were active as young people in the civil rights movement.
- *Checking on the Moon*, by Jenny Davis (New York: Orchard Books, 1991). This book recounts the events of one summer in the life of Cab Jones. Cab and her brother are spending the summer with their grandmother near Pittsburgh. Crime on the street becomes a neighborhood issue, and the neighbors band together to fight the problem.
- *Just Like Martin*, by Ossie Davis. This book recounts the story of a young African American boy who wants to emulate Martin Luther King by participating in the civil rights movement and being nonviolent.
- *Seedfolks*, by Paul Fleischman (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). Residents of a Cleveland neighborhood describe how and why they became involved into turning an empty lot into a garden. Some teachers may find elements of this book (a pregnant teen contemplates suicide) too difficult for their students.
- *The Unsinkable Molly Malone*, by Mary Anderson (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991). Sixteen-year-old Molly not only supplements her family income by selling her artwork on the street, she also gives art lessons to children in a homeless shelter. When two of her young students suffer traumas, she decides that she must do more to help them.

