

The Qualities of a Good Citizen

OBJECTIVE

Students learn about the value of being a good citizen and personalize ways they can act as good citizens.

MATERIALS

Access to a white board or blackboard in the classroom.

BACKGROUND

The original intent of public education was to prepare students to participate in our democratic society. In the past few decades, the focus of public education has turned sharply toward science, math and literacy as we seek to help students develop employable skills. The fact is, students need both: preparation to participate in the workforce and preparation to participate in society. Students need to know how our government and communities function, understand key issues and different perspectives, and be able to articulate their opinions with competence, respect and civility.

Research has shown that listening to civic leaders share their stories and viewpoints is an exceptional way to bring civics alive for students. According to a report commissioned by the American Bar Association Division for Public Education: "Civic education, especially when it is interactive and involves discussion of current issues, is an important way to develop the skills that young Americans need to succeed in the 21st Century workforce. Students who experience interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the highest on '21st Century Competencies,' including working with others (especially in diverse groups) and knowledge of economic and political processes."

LESSON PLAN

Introduction (5 minutes)

Start your classroom presentation by introducing yourself so the students know more about you and what you do. Most importantly, we encourage you to share something personal, meaningful or important to you that illustrates why you choose to do the work you do. If students know the 'why' behind your job, it will impact them more than if you just share your job title.

You can also share why you chose to volunteer to come to their classroom. Why do you think it's important for students to hear from civic leaders? What are the outcomes you are hoping for as a

result of your visit? Were you nervous to come? Excited? What do you remember about your experience in school that might affect how to approach your classroom visit?

Activity

Start by saying something like: “A lot of times, people think that being a good citizen refers to being involved in activities such as holding public office, voting, or upholding the law or serving on a jury. While these activities are important, good citizens also contribute to the common good in a wide variety of other ways.”

Write the following question on the chalkboard: **What qualities make a good citizen?** Then brainstorm with students the characteristics of a good citizen, as well as actions that they think a good citizen would take. Write their answers on the chalkboard or on posting paper. **(15 minutes)**

Next, have the students get into groups of four. Have each group choose three of the qualities from the board and write them on a sheet of paper. Then have each group write down a real-life example of that quality AND at least one effect or benefit that quality has on society. For example:

1. A quality that makes a good citizen: Concern for the environment
2. A real-life example of someone with that quality: A forest ranger
3. The effect or benefit that quality has on society: Our forests will be healthy, which helps our planets and provides places in nature for people to go visit.

Allow the groups to discuss and write down three qualities, real-life examples, and effects or benefits. **(15 minutes, including time to get into groups)**

Once all the groups have completed the task, go around the room and have each group share what they wrote. **(10 minutes)**

After all the groups have had a chance to share, ask students to write their thoughts on the following question: “Thinking about what we saw and discussed today, and comparing those ideas to your own beliefs and actions, what is one example of a quality you have or an action you have taken to be a good citizen?” **(5 minutes)**

If there’s time, go around the room and invite people to share their answers if they are comfortable.