

---

# CHAPTER 4

## INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND CITIZENSHIP

---

By Fredricka L. Stoller

In civic education curricula, citizenship and individual responsibilities is an important theme. Discussions about the role of citizen participation at local, state, and national levels usually lead to provocative questions such as these: What does it mean to be a good citizen? What is the importance of being an informed citizen? To what extent should citizens participate in society and politics? Recently, questions about world citizenship and individual responsibilities--to ensure a safe and sane world--have been raised. In this lesson, students will explore select aspects of this theme. While discussing citizenship and individual responsibilities, students will learn associated vocabulary and concepts. As a result of this content-based lesson, students will not only improve their language skills, but they will also gain knowledge about this important and timely theme. The lesson outlined here can be used by teachers in a variety of ways: They can use it as a single, stand-alone lesson; they can design a series of connected lessons that explore the theme in more detail; or they can develop a thematic unit that examines the theme from a variety of perspectives over a longer period of time. These lesson plan ideas are meant to serve as a springboard for teachers interested in introducing the theme of citizenship and individual responsibilities to their students.

---

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

---

Discussions of citizenship and the responsibilities that accompany it are common in civic education curricula. An exploration of these topics can take on many dimensions, though it is important for students to understand, early on, that being a citizen is not simply limited to having a passport from the country in which one is born, or being a resident of a particular city, state, or country. Citizenship implies certain rights (e.g., legal, political, social); it also implies responsibilities, including placing the well-being, or **common good**, of society before private and personal interests.

When exploring citizenship and individual responsibilities, classroom teachers can shape lessons to examine a range of perspectives. Some teachers interested in this topic divide responsibilities into two areas: personal and civic. Personal responsibilities include taking care of oneself, accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions, taking advantage of opportunities to become educated, and fulfilling responsibilities to one's family, friends, and neighbors. Civic responsibilities, on the other hand, comprise obeying laws, respecting the rights and opinions of others, paying taxes, serving in the military, voting, and being informed and attentive to the needs of one's community and nation. Civic responsibility can also include the obligation to be honest, compassionate, tolerant, fair, trustworthy, respectful, open minded, and open to negotiation and compromise.

Other discussions of responsible citizenship center around the issue of participation in society at local, state, and national levels. Responsible citizens are often said to be active socially and politically. Social activity might entail joining citizens' groups that are devoted to solving societal problems, such as homelessness, race relations, or neighborhood crime; social activity could also involve volunteering in a local hospital, school, homeless shelter, or senior citizens' home. Political activity is quite different from social activity. Students need to understand that political activity usually refers to more than the simple act of voting in periodic elections. It might entail talking about public issues; writing letters to **public officials**; presenting a problem to a governmental council; staying informed about important issues by reading the newspaper, listening to television news, or attending public meetings; or getting involved in a political campaign.

Recent discussions of responsible citizenship have taken on new dimensions and have expanded to include the concept of worldwide citizenship. As international travel, communication, and exchanges have become easier and more common, citizens of different countries are becoming more dependent upon one another. This interdependence has given birth to the notion of world citizenship, that is, being a citizen of the world. In general, world citizens are concerned about issues that affect all nations and all people, including overpopulation, the mismanagement of natural resources, and pollution. World citizenship, as a new type of citizenship, requires new sets of individual responsibilities.

## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

---

The 50-minute lesson plan which follows highlights select issues related to the theme of this chapter: individual responsibilities and citizenship. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this lesson to the language and content learning needs of their students. Adjustments can easily be made so that the lesson matches the needs of lower or higher proficiency English language learners.

### Preliminary Lesson Planning

Materials:

- Create Handout 1 for Activity 1 using items in [Appendix A](#). Format the handout so that it looks like this:

Individual citizens can participate in both community and national life in many different ways. How important are these forms of participation? *Very important (+)*; *Important (✓)*; *Not important (–)*

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Voting in elections

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Running for office

- For Activity 2, original student groups
- should be assigned one single quotation from [Appendix B](#). Ideally, each group will be assigned a different quotation from the appendix. If the class is made up of more than nine groups, either find

additional quotations on citizenship and individual responsibilities, or assign quotations from the appendix to more than one group.

- Teachers may simplify the vocabulary of original quotations, without changing the meaning, to make them accessible to their students. Students in each group should receive their own strip of paper with the quotation assigned to the group. Thus, teachers will need to make sets of "quotation strips" before class begins.

#### *Student grouping decisions:*

- Decide on procedures for grouping students for Activities 1 and 2. Students will remain in the same groups for Activity 1 and the first part of Activity 2. Half way through Activity 2, students will be assigned to new groups. The new groups will consist of students who have considered different quotations in the first part of Activity 2. It is recommended that groups have no more than six participants each. If appropriate, make up tentative lists of group members. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

#### *Vocabulary considerations:*

- Consider the vocabulary that students need to know to complete the lesson successfully. Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to be introduced to. Some important terms, and their definitions, are included in a glossary in [Appendix C](#). Items listed in the glossary are written in **bold** print the first time that they are mentioned in the lesson plan.

---

### **Warm Up Activity (approximately 5 minutes)**

#### **Purpose:**

- To stimulate student interest in the topic of individual responsibilities
- To tap students' background knowledge
- To introduce vocabulary that will facilitate successful completion of the lesson

#### **Procedures:**

1. Write the following two questions on the blackboard before class: What does it mean to be a citizen of a community, state, and country? What responsibilities do individual citizens have? Underline the word "citizen" in the first question and the word "responsibilities" in the second question.
2. When class begins, ask students to read the two questions silently. Ask students what they think the theme of the lesson will be. Make sure students understand the key words: **citizen** and **responsibilities**. After soliciting responses from a few students, reinforce the theme of the lesson by writing "Individual responsibilities and citizenship" on the blackboard above your questions. Spend no more than one minute soliciting student responses.
3. Ask students to take two minutes (and only two minutes) to write down whatever comes to mind in response to the two questions on the blackboard. The focus of the activity should be on idea generation, not correct grammar or proper formatting. Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers.

4. After students have written for two minutes, ask them to turn to a neighbor and take an additional two minutes to share their ideas. Students should not exchange papers. Rather they should only consult their written work for ideas.

---

### **Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1 (a few minutes)**

Pointing to the first question on the blackboard (What does it mean to be a citizen of a community, state, and country?), ask student volunteers to share some ideas with the class. Then point to the second question on the blackboard (What responsibilities do individual citizens have?) and ask for other student volunteers to share possible answers. Tell students that the class session will be devoted to exploring the responsibilities that individual citizens have in their city, state, and nation.

### **Activity #1 (approximately 15-20 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To give students the opportunity to consider a range of individual responsibilities and their importance to society
- To give students a chance to express their opinions to others and to consider (possibly) diverse opinions of others
- To give students the chance to use key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson

*Procedures:*

1. Distribute Handout 1 to all students. Ask students to work individually to complete the handout. Tell students that they should consider each responsibility listed on the handout and decide whether it is very important, important, or not important. They should indicate their opinion in the space provided with a plus (+) for very important, a check mark (✓) for important, or a minus (-) for not important. Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers. Ask students to work as quickly as possible.
2. As students are filling out their handouts, circulate and make sure students understand all of the vocabulary. Provide clarification if necessary.
3. Put students into groups. Ask students to compare their answers. To focus group discussions, ask students to concentrate on those responsibilities where differences of opinion exist (i.e., on items with different responses). Students should explain the reasons for their responses. (Groups that finish early--because group members are basically in agreement with one another--should concentrate on whether their reasons for similar responses are the same or different.)
4. Ask student volunteers to report a few into
5. resting differences of opinion and reasons for differing views.

---

### **Activity #2 (approximately 20-25 minutes)**

Purpose:

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson
- To give students the opportunity to consider different perspectives and come to a group decision
- To provide students with time to express their opinions

Procedures:

1. Ask students to remain in the same groups. Assign a different quotation (from [Appendix B](#)) to each group of students; give each group member a strip of paper with the quotation assigned to the group.
2. Ask student groups to discuss the quotation assigned to them to determine its position, directly or indirectly stated, about citizenship and individual responsibilities. Put the following question on the blackboard to guide student discussion: What does the author of this quotation think about citizenship and individual responsibilities? Remind students that each and every student must be prepared to report on group deliberations/opinions.
3. While groups are engaged in discussion, circulate to keep students on task and to assist them with any vocabulary that they may need to express their opinions.
4. Put students in new groups; the new groups should be made up of students who can report on different quotations. Ask students to take turns reading their quotations to new group members and explaining authors' positions on citizenship and individual responsibilities.
5. Circulate to keep students on task.
6. Ask groups to select one of the quotations, from those represented in their groups, as their favorite. The group should be able to defend their choice.

### **Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)**

Purpose:

- To recycle important concepts
- To provide some closure to lesson
- To give students an opportunity to discuss relevance of lesson

#### Procedures:

1. Ask groups to report on their favorite quotation about citizenship and individual responsibilities. Ask student volunteers to explain their groups' reason(s) for selecting the quotation as their favorite.
2. Ask students what new insights they gained about citizenship and individual responsibilities from the lesson.

#### Possible Extensions to Lesson

1. Ask students to write up their own original statements about citizenship and responsibility based on the information that they learned in the lesson. Then ask students to share their "original quotations" with each other.
2. Ask students any of these questions to extend the lesson.
  - A. What should a citizen do if a law conflicts with his/her beliefs, morals, and/or religion?
  - B. Under what circumstances do you think a citizen has a right to violate a law?
  - C. What arguments can you make to convince a friend to become a more active citizen?
  - D. What are the best ways to become an informed citizen?
  - E. Should all citizens who are **eligible** to vote be required to vote? Should people who do not vote be **fin**ed? Why? Why not?
  - F. What can a citizen do to make a difference?
  - G. What is more important, being an active citizen at the local level or the national level? Why?
3. What does it mean to be a citizen of the world?
  - A. What advantages come with world citizenship? What disadvantages?
  - B. Do you think world citizenship will be possible in your lifetime? Why? Why not?
  - C. Does everyone have a responsibility to help with worldwide problems, such as overpopulation, misuse of natural resources, pollution? What can be done to eliminate these serious problems?
  - D. What can people do to become more conscientious citizens of the world?
4. Refer to the websites listed in the next section of this chapter for more information and lesson planning ideas.

[Back to the top of Chapter 4](#)

## Appendix A

### Items for Activity 1: Handout on Individual Responsibilities

Individual citizens can participate in both community and national life in many different ways. How important are these forms of participation?

*Very important (+); Important (✓); Not important (-)*

1. Voting in elections
2. Running for office
3. Participating in political life
4. Getting an education
5. Being active in the community
6. Staying informed by reading newspapers, listening to the news on the radio, etc.
7. Talking about public issues
8. Writing letters to **public officials** about important issues
9. Obeying laws
10. Reporting **crimes**
11. Helping the community or nation in emergency situations
12. Respecting other people's **property**
13. Respecting other people's rights
14. Respecting other people's opinions
15. Paying taxes
16. Serving in the military
17. Serving on a **jury**
18. Doing volunteer work with community organizations (e.g., a school, a homeless shelter, a neighborhood crime watch)
19. Joining a citizen's group to work on a community problem
20. Keeping the environment clean
21. Recycling
22. Being tolerant, fair, truthful