

What It Means To Be a Citizen

by Lorraine Sintetos

Fascinating Facts

- Between 2001 and 2003, 1.4 million immigrants became United States citizens.
- During the week of July 4, 2003, 9,500 new citizens were sworn in.
- Most of the new citizens in this country now come from Mexico, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

Genre	Comprehension Skill	Text Features
Nonfiction	Compare and Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossary • Chart • Headings • Table of Contents

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The word *citizen* can have different meanings. In this book you will explore what it means to be a good citizen and how a good citizen can contribute to his or her community.



Vocabulary

- citizen
- custom
- immigrant
- opportunity
- community
- natural resource
- recycle

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by **Lorraine Sintetos**



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If you are a citizen of a country, you have certain rights and privileges. You are part of your country and you share in its **customs**.

The United States promises rights to its citizens. We can say or write what we think. We have the right to know what our government does.

The government takes care of many of our needs. It runs schools, libraries, and parks. It makes sure we get our mail and have clean water. It pays for police and firefighters.



1. What is a Citizen?

“He is a United States **citizen**.” “Be a good citizen.” Is the word *citizen* always used in the same way?

The word *citizen* has different meanings. In the first sentence, the word has a special meaning. A United States *citizen* is a citizen by law. In the second sentence, *citizen* means “a member of a group.” In this book you will learn about both kinds of citizens.



2



3



2. Responsibilities and Rights

One important right is the right to vote for our leaders. Once a citizen turns eighteen, he or she has the right to vote.

The right to vote brings responsibilities with it. We can vote for leaders who will make laws that help people. To find out about a leader's ideas, we should pay attention to the news.

Another responsibility citizens have is to pay taxes. You sometimes pay extra money called a sales tax when you buy something. There are other kinds of taxes too. The government uses tax money to take care of our needs.



We have a responsibility to obey laws. Some laws make sure everyone is treated fairly. Other laws protect us. Laws for cars and bikes tell us how to ride or drive safely. Laws about food and water make sure they are clean.

We have laws that help our country be a better place to live. Some laws say you must go to school. At school you learn to read, write, and think. This helps you become informed about ways to become a better citizen.





Some immigrants come to the United States for a short time. They go to school or work here and then go home. Some decide that they want to become United States citizens. They want to call this country their home. These people have the **opportunity** to become naturalized citizens. A naturalized citizen becomes a citizen by meeting the requirements on the chart below.





3. How to Become a Citizen

There are three ways to become a United States citizen.

One way is to be born in the United States.

Another way is to be born to parents who are United States citizens. It does not matter where you are born. If your parents are United States citizens, you are a United States citizen too!

The third way is to study to become a citizen. Some **immigrants** are eager to do this. They learn about United States history and government to become citizens.

YOU MUST BE EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD OR OLDER.

YOU MUST HAVE LIVED IN THE UNITED STATES
FOR AT LEAST FIVE YEARS.


YOU MUST BE ABLE TO READ, SPEAK, AND WRITE ENGLISH.

YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT UNITED STATES HISTORY
AND GOVERNMENT.

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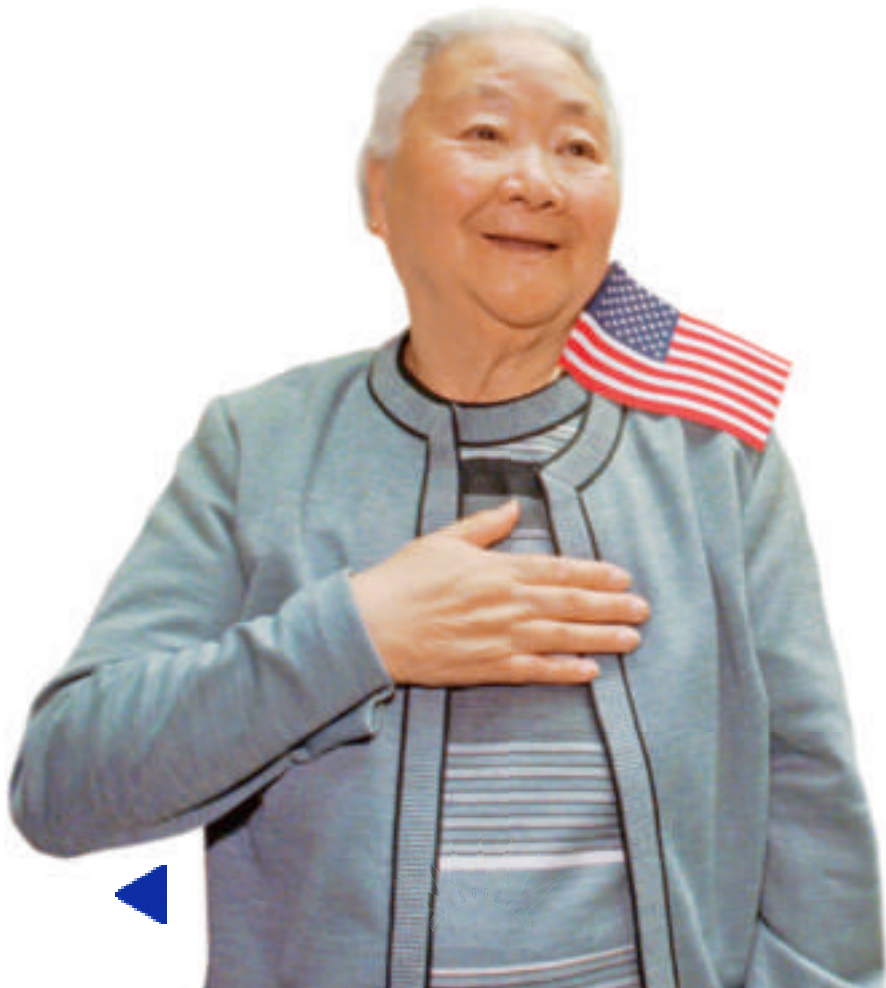
These are the rules for someone who wants to become a naturalized citizen.



 Immigrants who want to become United States citizens must take a test. They must show they have learned about United States history and government.

Knowing about our country's past is important. Stories from the past show our values and beliefs. They explain how we got our freedom.

Knowing about our government is helpful. Every citizen needs to understand how the government works.



4. Anyone Can Be a Good Citizen

Let's look at another meaning of *citizen*. The word *citizen* also means "someone who lives in a **community**." Anyone who lives in a community is a citizen of that community. Even visitors from other countries can be citizens of a community.

A community has a lot to offer. You can ride its buses and visit its shops. You can learn in its schools and play in its parks. Someday, you may work in a community.





You can give something back to your community by being a good citizen. You must do your best to get along with everyone else. You already know many ways to be a good citizen.

- Treat other people fairly.
- Be polite.
- Share what you have.
- Take turns.
- Do not take or damage another's property.
- Solve problems by talking.



5. Keep Your Community Clean

Imagine walking down a street where trash blows across the sidewalk. How would you feel? Trash makes most people feel gloomy.

Picking up trash is one way to be a good citizen. It shows pride in your community. Clean streets help people feel good about where they live.





Good citizens try not to use up Earth's **natural resources**. Resources are things that we use to meet our needs.

Trees are used for buildings, paper, and other products. Oil gives us power to drive cars and run factories. Minerals dug out of the ground are used in many ways. We have a limited supply of these natural resources.

Each time something is made, resources are used. Think twice before you ask for something new. Take care of what you own so that it will last a long time. **Recycle** when you can.



We are all citizens of the world. We can take pride in keeping Earth clean and beautiful. We can help make it a good place to live. This means keeping its air and water clean.

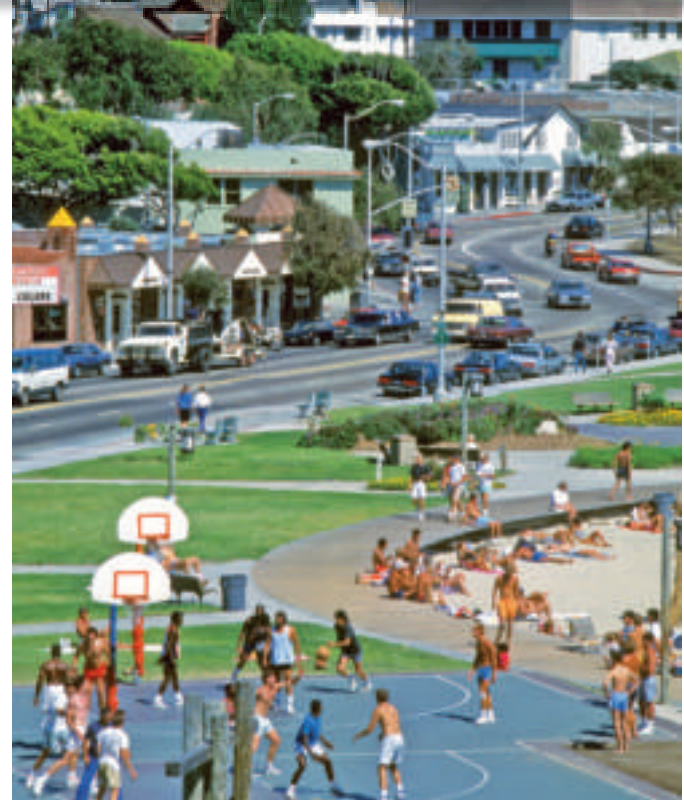
How can you keep the air clean? Cars produce gases that make the air dirty and hard to breathe. When you can, ride your bike or walk instead of riding in a car.



6. You Have a Lot to Give

Good citizens help others. For example, people volunteer. Volunteers offer their help without getting paid. They do things to improve their community.

You can volunteer. You can visit older people. You can help younger children with their homework. Somewhere, there is a way for you to help.



Most of us want the same things. We want to live safely with all of our needs met. We want to be treated fairly and live in peace. We want to be able to enjoy our freedom.

You can help make these wishes come true. You can be a good citizen of the United States and of your community. Every thoughtful act makes a difference.

As you make your community better, you also make the world better.



Glossary

citizen a member of a community

community a place where people live, work, and have fun together

custom a way of doing things

immigrant a person who moves into a country to live there

natural resource useful material that comes from the Earth

opportunity a chance for something better to happen

recycle to use something again

Write to It!

Think of some ways to be a good citizen. Be sure to tell how they would be good for your community. Write two paragraphs about your ideas.

Write your paragraphs on a separate sheet of paper.

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