

Summary: Citizenship and Democracy

Citizenship

In many countries throughout history most people have had no say in their government. In a democracy, all people help shape the government. The United States is a democracy that gives its citizens many rights. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution lists some rights, such as the right to speak freely, the right to practice any religion, and the right to a fair trial in court. One of the most important rights is the right to vote. When citizens vote, they help choose their government leaders. At age 18, citizens can register to vote.

Our government protects these rights. The government also protects the rights of all people to be treated fairly in housing and jobs, so that no one can discriminate against them because of religion or race. People who come to the United States from other countries can become citizens through the process of naturalization.

Citizens' Responsibilities

Our government gives citizens freedom and many rights. But citizens have responsibilities to the United States, too. Citizens must obey the law. This helps to keep our communities safe. Citizens must pay taxes. Taxes help the government pay for police, roads, and many other important services. Citizens are responsible for voting. Citizens must take turns being on a jury. Men over 18 years old have the responsibility of registering for the military. Young people have responsibilities, too. They must go to school. Education helps young people make good choices and decisions. This helps them become good citizens.

Our government works hard to make the United States a good place to live. But people need to help our democracy stay strong. Some ways to help are by learning about what is happening in the community, voting, and volunteering. Volunteers help communities in many ways. A strong democracy like the United States depends on its citizens to participate.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

naturalization *noun*, the process of learning the laws of the country and the rights and duties of citizens

register *verb*, to sign up
responsibility *noun*, a duty that people are expected to fulfill

volunteer *noun*, a person who helps other people without pay



After You Read

REVIEW At what age can citizens register to vote? Circle the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW In what ways can being informed about issues prepare young people to be good citizens? Circle the sentences that tell why education is important for young people.