

Being a Citizen in Today's World

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The role of the citizen in today's world is multi-faceted and varies widely from person to person – from voter to volunteer to community member to agent of change. This exercise allows students to explore the concept of citizenship and define it for themselves as well as begin to identify society's problems that call for citizen action.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Butcher paper
- Markers

STEPS:

1. Arrange chairs in a circle or have the students sit on the floor. Spread the butcher paper out in the middle of the circle. Ask one of the students to lie down on the butcher paper while another student or the teacher traces them with a marker. This outline is a citizen – have the group name the citizen.
2. Discuss what makes a good citizen. Ask questions like: *What do good citizens do? What are characteristics of a good citizen?* When the students answer the questions ask them to write or draw their answers on the butcher paper inside the outline of the citizen so that the citizen is filled with good qualities and actions. Continue this brainstorming until everyone has had a chance to contribute their ideas.
3. When the outline of the citizen has been filled in, discuss the problems that citizens face. Ask the group: *What problems do you see in your community? What problems do you hear about? What makes you angry, scared or worried?*
4. Upon completion, discuss the ideas on the paper and how the group has already exemplified the characteristics of a good citizen. For example, you might ask questions like: *Who in your mind is a good citizen? (and why?) In what ways are we good citizens? What could we do to be even better citizens?* Ideas for closing this activity include:
 - Tell a story about citizens working together to solve problems (from the civil rights movement or something more recent.)
 - Discuss what the group could do to use their power as citizens. Consider taking action as a group.
 - Sing a song such as *"We are the Ones We've Been Waiting for"*
 - Introduce voting as a civic act.