

Why Study Civics?

What is civics and why do you study it?

Civics is the study of citizenship and government. It is the study of what it means to be a citizen. A citizen is a legally recognized member of a country. The word *civics* comes from the Latin *civis*, which means “citizen.” The concept of the citizen originated in Greece around 590 BC, and was later adopted by the Romans.

Being a Citizen

What it means to be a citizen has changed since the Roman Republic. Romans used the term to distinguish the people who lived in the city of Rome from people born in the territories that Rome had conquered.

If a man or boy was a citizen (women had some rights but could not be citizens), he had many privileges. Roman citizens had the right to vote and had a say in the way their country was run. Citizens had duties, too, such as paying taxes, attending assembly meetings, and serving in the Roman army.

Citizens today have rights and responsibilities that differ from country to country. For example, many countries allow their citizens to vote, but some do not. Most nations require their citizens to pay taxes, just as Rome did. Some countries, such as Israel, require all citizens—men and women—to serve in the military. The rights and duties of citizens depend on their country’s type of government. A government is the organizations, institutions, and individuals who exercise political authority over a group of people.

Being an Effective Citizen

How can you be an effective citizen? Here are 10 characteristics of a good citizen. You can probably think of others.

Good citizens...

- 1.** are responsible family members,
- 2.** respect and obey the law,
- 3.** respect the rights and property of others,
- 4.** are loyal to and proud of their country,
- 5.** take part in and improve life in their communities,
- 6.** take an active part in their government,
- 7.** use natural resources wisely,
- 8.** are informed on key issues and willing to take a stand on these issues,
- 9.** believe in equal opportunity for all people, and
- 10.** respect individual differences, points of view, and ways of life that are different from their own.