

Creating Effective Citizens

Issues in Social Studies Video: All Grade Levels

Introduction

Summary

How do social studies concepts translate into the practical skills and knowledge students need to become effective citizens? How do students learn to reconcile often competing notions of democracy, such as individual freedom versus the common good? Everyone agrees that engaging students in civic concepts and processes is an important goal, but there are differing views about how to meet that goal.

Some educators use positive examples from history to provide a solid foundation for the principles of democratic citizenship. Others support this approach but add a rigorous examination of the issues that arise within a democracy.

Both perspectives point to innovative ways of teaching students what effective citizenship entails—from researching an issue, to voting, to proposing a bill—so that, as students are learning about the different functions of local and national government, they are also realizing their roles as citizens.

In a participatory democracy, the skills of good citizenship are best introduced at an early age. The classroom provides an ideal forum for this kind of instruction, as students learn how to formulate an opinion and articulate and defend their ideas. Classroom discussions of issues with multiple perspectives help students become better decision makers. When introduced to multiple perspectives, students also learn to think critically and fairly. After understanding how conflict can be settled in the classroom, students can apply their skills on the community and national level.

Overview

Social studies is the subject area most directly linked to developing the knowledge, skills, and values associated with responsible citizenship in a democratic society. In the video, “Creating Effective Citizens,” teaching students how to become active and effective citizens is illustrated by:

- role-play and simulations that model civic action,
- discussing controversial laws about gender discrimination and individual rights,
- exploring what it means to be a global citizen within a democracy, and
- engaging students in local and national issues.

Exploring the Issues

Providing Contexts and Processes

“As you move into the middle school, not only do students begin to pick up historical perspectives on citizenship, but they also gain cultural perspectives on citizenship and relate citizenship to various forms of government across the world.” —Mary A. McFarland, Social Studies Educator and Consultant

Wrestling With the Issue

- How might the level of student knowledge, skills, and democratic values change from the primary grades up through high school? What are the most important concepts and biggest challenges at each level? What concepts do you defer to social studies learning in other grades? Why?
- How do you ensure that students make the connection between classroom democracy and active participation in local and national government?
- What does active citizenship for students entail? What are your criteria for deciding when students should be involved in local or national issues?

Examining Citizenship and Democracy

“Part of my objective was not only to define democracy, but to show how complex it is and how difficult it is to sustain. I want students to understand that it is the responsibility of all citizens to maintain that democracy.” —Wendell Brooks, Ninth-Grade World History Teacher, Berkeley, California

Wrestling With the Issue

- How do you convey the unique characteristics of American democracy? How do you show that government is a system that needs care and maintenance?
- What kinds of activities help students examine and practice the roles of citizens in a democracy?
- How do you ensure that students understand their roles as global citizens when the focus is often national democracy?

Applying What You've Learned

As you reflect on these classroom activities from the video, think about how you might adapt and extend these ideas in your own teaching.

- In her first-grade class, Cynthia Vaughn helps her students role-play citizenship. The class tours their own community, then constructs a model town in which each student assumes the role of a business owner, community leader, or citizen. Working together, students think about issues in their model community, share their concerns with the “mayor,” and come up with solutions.
- Wendy Ewbank’s seventh- and eighth-grade students use landmark Supreme Court cases to study how citizens’ rights are supported by various amendments. Students research the cases, simulate a town meeting, and assume the roles of plaintiffs, defendants, and judges. Through a process of questioning, Ms. Ewbank and her class examine important points, the constitutional issues involved, the judicial process, and the Court’s ruling in each case.
- Tom Rockey’s 12th-grade civics students discuss court cases related to gender discrimination, examining the conditions under which it is and is not reasonable to discriminate based on gender. But before the students begin, Mr. Rockey outlines several characteristics of civil discourse, such as listening to the ideas of others.

Consider your own classroom as you answer the following questions. Write down your answers or discuss them as a group.

- Considering that active citizenship often involves discussing issues within a community, how do you define civil discourse in your classroom? How do you ensure fairness and respect across different skill levels in discussions?
- What are the common elements of citizenship when talking about national and global citizenship?
- When do you use historical models to teach citizenship and when do you get students engaged with more complex concepts such as individual freedom and the common good?
- What issues or projects in your community lend themselves to student involvement? How can your students become involved?

Links to the Lessons

“Creating Effective Citizens” features the following teachers and lessons from the *Social Studies in Action* library:

- Cynthia Vaughn: Leaders, Community, and Citizens
- Darlene Jones-Inge: Making a Difference Through Giving
- Libby Sinclair: Understanding Stereotypes
- Justin Zimmerman: The Middle East Conflict
- Becky Forristal: Population and Resource Distribution
- Wendy Ewbank: Landmark Supreme Court Cases
- Wendell Brooks: Competing Ideologies
- Tim Rockey: Gender-Based Distinctions
- Brian Poon: The Individual in Society

Standards

Each video lesson in the library is keyed to standards and performance expectations. *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. Effective citizenship relates most directly to the following NCSS themes:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Global Connections
- Civic Ideals and Practices

Resources

Print Resources for Teachers

Mann, Sheilah and John J. Patrick, eds. *Education for Civic Engagement in Democracy: Service Learning and Other Promising Practices*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies and Social Science Education, 2000.

Parker, W. C., ed. *Education for Democracy, Contexts, Curricula, Assessments*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2002.

Rose, Lowell C. and Alec M. Gallup. "The 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." V82, n1, p. 21-66, Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappan, 2000.

Soder, R., J. I. Goodlad, and T. J. McMannon, eds. *Developing Democratic Character in the Young*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2001.

Web Resources for Teachers

National Council for Social Studies: <http://www.ncss.org>

The NCSS identifies ways of implementing standards-based themes in social studies curricula.

Debate of Important National Issues: <http://www.nifi.org/>

This site contains a non-partisan network of educational and community organizations that promote the debate of important national issues.

National and Community Service: <http://www.nationalservice.org/>

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides links to community service organizations in each state and a guidebook for student involvement.

National Center for Education Statistics: <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/cived/>

The National Center for Education Statistics site focuses on the highlights of U.S. results in the 1999 International IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Civic Education Study.