

Who Are Citizens of the United States?

United States citizens need to study up on their country.



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Are you a master at math? A rock star at reading? What about civics? If you are like millions of Americans, your government know-how might be more of a “know-little.”

Civics is the study of the rights and duties of citizens. A good citizen needs to know at least basic information about the nation, such as how the government is run. He or she also needs to know about the country’s history and the problems and challenges facing the nation today.

However, studies have found that a lot of Americans don’t know enough about the United States. In one study, only one in three Americans could name the three branches of U.S. government. In another, less than 4 percent of teens in Arizona could pass a U.S. citizenship test. That is a test people from other countries need to pass to become U.S. citizens.

Those findings could make Uncle Sam want to move to Canada! After all, if U.S. citizens don’t know about their country, they can’t help run it, said former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. “We are [very lucky] to have a stable ... government,” she told *WR News*. “But ... it is the citizens of our nation who must preserve our system of government, and we cannot forget that.”

Citizens Rule!

When the country’s founders wrote the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they gave the power to the people! They thought U.S. citizens should have a say in how the nation is run.

One of the most important responsibilities Americans have is voting. U.S. citizens elect many of the people who run the country, from city officials to the U.S. president. Those elected officials make and enforce, or put into effect, laws that affect the whole country.

That's why it's so important that U.S. citizens get clued in on U.S. civics, said Syd Golston. She was the president of the National Council for the Social Studies. "People who vote need to be informed [or educated] because they're really making the decisions," Golston told *WR News*.

Civics in Motion



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Uncle Sam wants Americans to learn more about U.S. civics!

Some U.S. education experts say schools spend less time teaching civics now than they did in the past. "It used to be a subject that was taught ... so many minutes a day," says Margaret Branson. She is the associate director of the Center for Civic Education. "The teaching of civics and government has just dropped off dramatically."

O'Connor has tried to change that. She has spoken out in TV interviews, stressing the value of learning about the United States. She also works with Our Courts, a website that teaches people about U.S. civics.

Other star citizens have spoken out on Uncle Sam's behalf. Actor Richard Dreyfuss crafted a national plan for civics education. Former Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter stepped up U.S. civics talk in schools in his home state of New Hampshire.

Use the News

But studying in school isn't the only way to become a civics know-it-all, Golston points out. "Read a newspaper, [and] watch the news with your parents," she suggests.

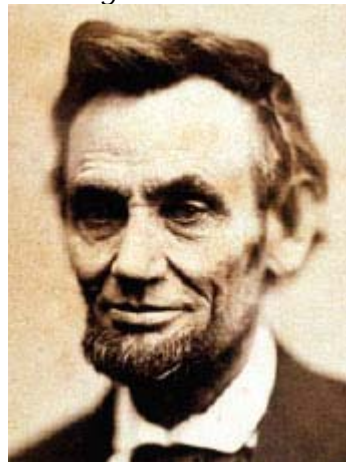
Pop Quiz!

Are you a U.S. civics smarty pants? Time to find out!



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(1) What was the purpose of the Declaration of Independence?



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(2) Name one of Abraham Lincoln's accomplishments.



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(3) What two groups make up the U.S. Congress?



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(4) In which state is the Statue of Liberty?



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(5) What did Susan B. Anthony fight for?

(6) In which month do U.S. citizens vote for president?



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(7) Name one country that the United States fought in World War II.



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(8) What is Martin Luther King Jr. famous for?

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the text, what is civics?

- A Civics is reading newspapers and learning about current events.
- B Civics is studying to pass a citizenship test.
- C Civics is the study of rights and duties of citizens.
- D Civics is the voting process Americans must follow.

2. This text discusses the problem that a lot of Americans don't know enough about the United States. Based on the text, what is one solution to this problem?

- A ignore civics in schools
- B make everyone visit museums
- C increase civics education in schools
- D make everyone take a citizenship test

3. Based on the text, it is likely that Sandra Day O'Connor

- A thinks civics is an important part of education for students
- B thinks students do not need to know about civics
- C thinks that the U.S. should change how people are elected
- D thinks that kids should watch more TV and spend more time on the internet

4. Read the following sentences: "O'Connor has tried to change that. She has spoken out in TV interviews, stressing the value of learning about the United States. She also works with Our Courts, a website that teaches people about U.S. civics."

As used in the text, what does the word "**stressing**" most nearly mean?

- A making nervous
- B emphasizing
- C making seem less important
- D speaking against

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A One of the most important responsibilities Americans have is voting
- B A lot of Americans don't know enough about the United States so they need to learn more about civics.
- C Studying in school isn't the only way to become a civics know-it-all.
- D Civics is the study of the rights and duties of citizens.

6. List at least two ways people can learn more about civics based on information in the text.

7. Explain one argument the author of the text is trying to make. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

It's important that American citizens get clued in on U.S. civics _____ they need to be informed in order to make important decisions when voting.

- A after
- B although
- C because
- D though

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The founders of the U.S. gave the power to the people when they wrote the U.S. Constitution because they thought U.S. citizens should have a say in how the nation is run.

Who? the founders of the U.S.

What did the founders of the U.S. do? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a and 10b.

Vocabulary Word: **duties** (du·ties): things that a person should do because it is right or fair or because they are part of his or her job or position.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word **duties**.

1. American citizens have duties, which include the responsibility of voting for the president.
2. The duties of her job require her to work with many different kinds of people.
3. When I was pet sitting for my aunt's cat, making sure that the cat's water bowl was full was one of my duties.
4. Policemen have many duties, but their main responsibility is making sure people are safe and protected.
5. I complete all my duties because my parents won't let me watch TV until I've finished all of the tasks I'm responsible for.

10b. Use the word "duties" in a sentence.
