

# American Experiments

## #MyFellowCitizens

Since the founding of the American republic, when the power of the nation was entrusted not in a monarchy but in its citizens, each generation has questioned and considered how to form “a more perfect union.”

The American Experiments suite of educational resources builds off of this question by challenging students to think about their roles and responsibilities within their democracy. *#MyFellowCitizens* asks students to think critically about what good citizenship means to them.

The learning begins with the guiding question: *What does it mean to be a good citizen?*

Students investigate this question by looking at the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance, which foreign-born people must take to become naturalized American citizens, and thinking deeply about what are or should be crucial requirements of citizenship. This lesson guides students to closely examine information, to ask probing questions, and to take part in complex discussions with classmates.

Students will:

- Analyze complex ideas about the expectations of citizenship using the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance and historical objects as sources of evidence.
- Practice deliberating challenging and multi-faceted issues by engaging in informed discussions about the meaning of “good citizenship” with classmates.
- Develop their own ideas about what good citizens should do as members of the American democracy and share their conclusions with appropriate audiences.

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## Aligned Standards

### College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- D2.Civ.2.6-8. Explain specific roles played by citizens (such as voters, jurors, taxpayers, members of the armed forces, petitioners, protesters, and office-holders).
- D2.Civ.13.6-8. Analyze the purposes, implementation, and consequences of public policies in multiple settings.
- D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to the various theories of democracy, changes in American's participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- D2.Civ.13.9-12. Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

### Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## Assessments

This lesson builds information analysis and discussion-based skills. Throughout the lesson, student learning can be formatively assessed through their participation in the investigation and discussion activities. This can be recorded using a simple tally like the table shown below. This tally could be completed by teachers or individual students to record their own progress.

Student Name	Participating in the learning task	Demonstrating skills of civil dialogue	Evaluating multiple perspectives	Using text or object-based evidence
Student A	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Student B	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓

Conduct a summative assessment using the revised oaths and statement slates created by students. Students should demonstrate an understanding of the expectations of citizens as well as the concept that these expectations can and often do change to reflect shifting societal expectations and political trends.



## Pacing Guide

*#MyFellowCitizens* is a flexible lesson that can be conducted over the course of one or several class periods. The pacing guide below shows an example of how to facilitate this as a 45- or 90-minute activity.

Learning Task	45-Minute Lesson	90-Minute Lesson
Warm-Up Task	2 minutes	2 minutes
Activity Procedures Review	3 minutes	3 minutes
Historical Background and Primary Resource Analysis	10 minutes	10 minutes
Oath Analysis	10 minutes	20 minutes
Findings Discussion	10 minutes	15 minutes
Additions to the Oath	7 minutes	15 minutes
Feedback and Revisions (optional)	0 minutes	20 minutes
Reflection and Assessment	3 minutes	5 minutes
<b>Total</b>	<b>45 minutes</b>	<b>90 minutes</b>

## Glossary of Terms

**Citizen:** An inhabitant of a particular place (for the purposes of this activity, legal status of an individual does not need to be considered).

**Discussion:** The action or process of talking about something with the purpose of exchanging ideas.

**Engaged Citizen:** A person who feels responsibility for a community and takes informed action to promote positive social change.

**Naturalization:** The process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after that person fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

**Naturalization Oath of Allegiance:** Oath taken by foreign-born people to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

**Oath:** A serious, often formal, promise that people make to do what they have said.



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## Room Arrangement

Arrange desks into groups for two to four students. These will be used for small-group investigations and discussions throughout the lesson. Create a space in the center of the room where students can participate in full class discussions.

## Warm-Up Task

Ask students: What does good citizenship look like? Have students individually write or draw their answers by completing the sentence at the top of the statement slate shown below. Students should use the following prompts to help them decide how they want to complete the sentence. A copy of this handout is included at the end of this guide.

Think about what citizenship means to you. Does it mean obeying laws? Following traditions? Defending the nation? Being engaged and informed? Something else?

Encourage students to communicate and explain their ideas by having them share with their group or report out to the class. Students should keep their statements—they will use them again at the end of this lesson.

**I believe good citizens should...**

**#MyFellowCitizens**



## Activity Procedures

Prepare students for the activity by reviewing the following. Reviewing these roles and procedures will help build community and ready students for discussions that are productive, civil, and open-minded.

<b>Student Role</b>	Students will step into the role of a policy analyst charged with examining the U.S. Naturalization Oath of Allegiance and providing their recommendation for how it should be updated. They must think carefully about the oath and its intended outcomes, American ideals, and their own opinions about what it means to be a good citizen.
<b>Teacher Role</b>	The teacher will move the activity forward and facilitate investigations or discussions at each step.
<b>Process</b>	Students will critically assess the meaning and goals of the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance, as it changed from its introduction over 200 years ago until today. Throughout the activity, students will be asked to formulate and share well-informed opinions with classmates through facilitated discussions.
<b>Goal</b>	The goal of this activity is for students to critically examine what it means to be a good citizen and to communicate answers to that question by updating the oath and by creating a call to action for their peers.
<b>Norms</b>	To help foster thoughtful, reflective, and responsive group work and discussions, have students create a class set of behavioral norms. (They can also be used in future lessons!)

Some suggestions include:

- Be respectful and open to new ideas.
- Share the floor.
- Stay on topic.
- Everyone participates.
- Seek first to understand, then to speak.

Once the list has been created, post it somewhere visible. As the authors, students are responsible for both adhering to these norms and reminding their peers to follow them.



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# Historic Background of the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance

Discuss the historical background information below with students, using the objects on this page to illustrate each concept.

## American Ideals

Fulfilling the ideals of American democracy required determining the meaning of citizenship. Not clearly articulated in the founding documents, these unsettled issues have persisted since the founding of the country. Some basic questions have long been debated by Americans, including this question: What should be the shared responsibilities, rights, and ideals held by citizens?

*Analysis:* Have students examine this question by exploring the symbols shown in the 1790s Liberty Banner. A critical-thinking outline for this task is included at the end of this guide.

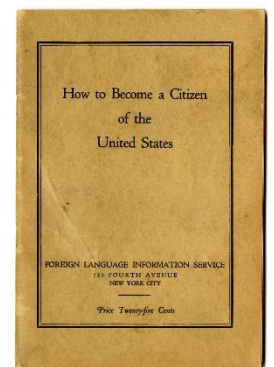


Liberty Banner, 1790s

## Public Policy

From the earliest years of the Republic, laws (representing various points of view) have been passed and guidelines have been developed to instruct prospective citizens on American history, values, rights, and responsibilities. Since 1790 foreign-born people who apply to become naturalized U.S. citizens must take an Oath of Allegiance.

*Analysis:* Display the image of the 1926 brochure “How to Become a Citizen of the United States” and ask the critical-thinking questions found at the end of this guide. Encourage students to think about the purpose of an oath and brainstorm three things they think should be included in an Oath of Allegiance.



Brochure, "How to Become a Citizen of the United States," 1926

## Modifying the Oath

Over the past 200+ years, new legislation has changed the oath multiple times, often to clarify or add requirements. There are also ways that the oath can be modified in certain circumstances: (1) People with strong religious or ethical objections to war can recite a modified form of the oath. (2) Saying the phrase “So help me God” is optional.

*Analysis:* Ask students to think about and share ideas of why the oath might have been changed or why it is able to be modified.



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## Oath Analysis

Have students read and analyze the U.S. Naturalization Oath of Allegiance. A copy of this text with critical-thinking prompts can be found at the end of this guide. Modify this task to meet students' learning needs. Suggested strategies include:

- Analyzing the lines as a full class.
- Setting up stations focused on selected lines from the oath.
- Chunking the task using text-dependent questions.
- Assigning small teams to analyze one line and then share their findings through jigsaw groups.

## Findings Discussion

Bring students back together for a discussion on their findings. Use the prompts below to structure the conversation. This discussion can be effectively facilitated using a Socratic Seminar format, in which students draw from the text to develop and share their ideas.

- Opening question: What do you think are the intended outcomes of the oath?
- Deeper-thinking prompts:
  - Are you surprised by anything included in the oath?
  - Do you agree with its requirements? What are the pros and cons of each one?
  - Which requirements do you think are the most important?
- Concluding question: If all Americans had to take the oath, what requirements should be added?

## Recommended Revisions

Instruct students to create their own recommendations for an oath of good citizenship that should be taken by both natural-born and naturalized citizens. Have students work in teams to come up with a shared list that they can all agree on. A note-taking sheet for this learning task is included at the end of this guide. As they work through this process, students should:

- Think about what they think good citizenship looks like.
- Decide which pieces of the oath they think should be kept.
- Revise or remove pieces that they feel are outdated.
- Write in additional lines that they feel are missing.

*Enrichment Opportunity:* Have students share their draft recommendations with and receive feedback from peers. Feedback should be constructive and positive, helping students to think more deeply about the requirements of citizenship. Students should revise their work accordingly.

Have students communicate their conclusions, explaining their reasons for their choices and what outcomes they think their recommended oath would have.



## Reflection

After students have created and shared their recommendations, have them reflect on this experience and how they might apply what they have learned to their own lives in and out of school. The following prompts can be used to have students think individually or in small groups, and through writing, artistic, or verbal reflections.

### Activity Review (the what)

- What did it feel like to share your opinions and recommendations with others?
- Did everyone on your team agree on the same recommendations? How did you work together to come to decisions?
- Has your understanding of what it means to be a good citizen changed? How?

### Connections to Democracy (the so what)

- Why might people define good citizenship in different ways? How can hearing from a variety of perspectives on a topic help us make more informed decisions?
- In your opinion, why is it important to think about what good citizenship means and looks like?

### Next Steps (the now what)

- Discussing challenging and complex topics is an important part of democratic participation. How can you apply the discussion strategies you practiced in this lesson to other conversations about public issues?
- Go back to the statement slate you made at the beginning of this lesson. Revise it to reflect what you have learned during this activity's discussions and investigations.

**We'd love to know how you are using this lesson! Email us at [HistoryTeachers@si.edu](mailto:HistoryTeachers@si.edu) with questions, feedback, and suggestions.**

**The American Experiments lesson plans are made possible by a gift from the Julie and Greg Flynn Family Fund.**



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## Suggested Modifications

<b>Small Groups</b>	Facilitate this activity in small groups of three to four students. Have each group work together to analyze the primary resources, engage in discussions, and create recommendations. This strategy can work well for classes of students that are not as comfortable with large-group discussion or that need more small-group instruction.
<b>Fishbowl Discussions</b>	Strengthen students' speaking and listening skills by using a fishbowl strategy during the findings discussion. Divide the class into two even groups. Have the first group sit in a circle in the middle of the room, and begin the discussion using the provided prompts. Have the second group sit around the outside of the circle and observe both the content and the effectiveness of the conversation. Students should note when their peers demonstrate good uses of evidence, openness to new ideas, respectful dialogue, and expression of thoughtful conclusions. Have groups switch and repeat the exercise. Afterward, encourage students to respectfully critique their peers by sharing areas of strength and improvement.

## Extended Learning Opportunities

<b>Social Media Campaign</b>	Use the provided statement slates and #MyFellowCitizens to develop a social media campaign that shares students' ideas of what they think good citizens should do. Have each student take a picture holding their slate and tag it using the provided hashtag. Students should create a plan for their campaign, including means of sharing their posts, strategies to encourage likes and reposts, and methods track how successful they were. The National Museum of American History may even feature their photos on social media! <u>Before starting this project, be sure to check and follow your school's photo policies.</u>
<b>Keep the Discussion Going</b>	Reflect on the guiding question for this lesson: What does it mean to be a good citizen? Have students think about whether or not this was a good question to ask, and evaluate if there are other questions that might be better for helping students think about how people can effectively and positively participate in their communities and democracy. Have students develop their own "big questions" and examine them through facilitated discussions.
<b>Preparing for the Oath</b>	Dive deeper into how aspiring Americans become naturalized citizens. Using the Preparing for the Oath website from the National Museum of American History and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, have students investigate the naturalization process. Encourage students to reach out to naturalized citizens in their local area and conduct an oral history project to learn more about this experience and the diversity of their community.



# Facilitation Strategies for Teachers

The American Experiments interactives provide students with the opportunity to lead and engage in their own conversation in which they can examine concepts and issues, learn through discussion, encounter new perspectives, and find common ground with others. As the facilitator, your role is to guide this discussion.

## What does it mean to be a facilitator?

Your job is to support the students as they think critically and engage in thoughtful discussions about complex concepts of democracy. Being a facilitator can be a challenging position to be in during a lively and engaging discussion because it requires you to be a neutral guide rather than a participant with an opinion.

But being neutral does not mean that the facilitator is passive! You are impartial about the topic, but not about the process. The facilitator must pay close attention to both the spoken and unspoken dynamics of the conversation to ensure that students feel welcomed and engaged, that the discussion remains civil and thoughtful, and that the activity achieves its intended goals.

This **to-do list** can help you get started:

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Be Prepared</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the activity thoroughly. Brainstorm what ideas and views might be brought up and what might not be said. Be prepared to carefully present unvoiced perspectives to help the class dig deeper in to a question or prompt.</li><li>• Prepare prompting questions in advance, like “What do you think?” “Can you explain your thoughts?” “What example or evidence could you share to help us better understand what you are describing?”</li></ul>                             |
| <b>Set the Scene</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go over the objectives so students understand their expectations and the goals of the activity.</li><li>• Review any procedures or rules.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Manage the Discussion</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep track of who is talking.</li><li>• Take notes to capture points, thoughts, and tensions. Use your notes to develop questions and illuminate connections.</li><li>• Interject only as needed to clarify statements, move the conversation forward or deeper, defuse tension, and ensure all voices are heard.</li><li>• Keep an eye on time and know when to start winding down the conversation so that there is sufficient time to reflect individually and as a group.</li></ul> |
| <b>Coach your Students</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This can require the most energy during the discussion. See the next page for tips on managing a few specific instances that might come up in your classroom.</li></ul>   |



## Facilitation Strategies for Teachers, continued

Below are tips you can use when students:

### **Don't stick to the class norms**

- Keep the class norms posted where all participants can see them! Students will often moderate each other by reminding everyone of the rules.
- Take a five-minute break. During this time, invite a rule-breaking student to be a co-facilitator and talk with them about what it means to moderate the conversation. Putting a student in a new role may help them see the conversation differently.

### **Dominate the conversation**

- Ask the student to pause and invite others to react to what has been said.
- Give a general reminder that the goal is to hear all voices and a range of discussion, meaning the floor must be shared.

### **Choose to not participate**

- Start by going around the room or table and having each student say something. Simply saying a few words out loud in front of a group can release a bit of the pressure a student might be feeling and make it easier for them to speak later on.
- During the discussion, let the student know that you are going to ask for their thoughts after the next few people talk. This gives them time to either check back into the conversation or prepare what they want to say.
- Explain that part of this learning experience is to understand that even if someone opts out, they are still making a conscious choice to participate or not—which is a key concept of democracy. If a student chooses to not participate, ask them to explain their choice to “sit this one out,” or invite them to be a co-facilitator.

### **Struggle to explain their thoughts**

- Encourage students to think of an example that could illustrate what they are thinking. For example, a student might not be able to say which amendment gave women the right to vote, but they may be able to describe the woman suffrage movement.
- Pause the activity for a ten-minute research break. During this time, students can grab a textbook or access the internet to pull together evidence that might help them make their case.

### **Are ready to find common ground or reflect**

- As the conversation or available time winds down, encourage students to reflect on what they learned about themselves as a member of a democracy and about the role of discussion in making wise decisions about public issues.
- Ask students to share their thoughts on why discussion is an important part of a thriving democracy. Identify where students' ideas overlap—in other words, where do they share common ground?



## I Believe Citizens Should ...

In the statement slate below, write or draw one example of something you think good citizens should do. Think about what citizenship means to you. Does it mean obeying laws? Abiding by traditions? Defending the nation? Being engaged and informed? Something else?

**I believe good citizens should...**

**#MyFellowCitizens**



## Liberty Banner, 1790s

This rare silk banner was probably carried in a public parade in Philadelphia in the mid-to-late 1790s. The banner includes several symbols that represent the new republic of the United States of America after breaking away from British colonial rule—moving from a government led by a monarchy to one of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Using the critical-thinking prompts, closely examine the highlighted symbols below. What can this banner tell us about the values, rights, and responsibilities of American democracy?

The central figure of this banner is "Liberty." What does liberty mean?

Liberty is shown providing nourishment to an eagle, a symbol of America. What do you think this action of feeding the eagle represents?

This Liberty Cap represents the idea of freedom. What responsibilities come with having freedom?

Liberty is wearing Grecian clothing. What values might the clothing of Ancient Greece symbolize?

Liberty is depicted standing victoriously over a fallen crown and broken chains of the monarchy. By breaking away from the British crown, what rights did Americans establish for themselves?

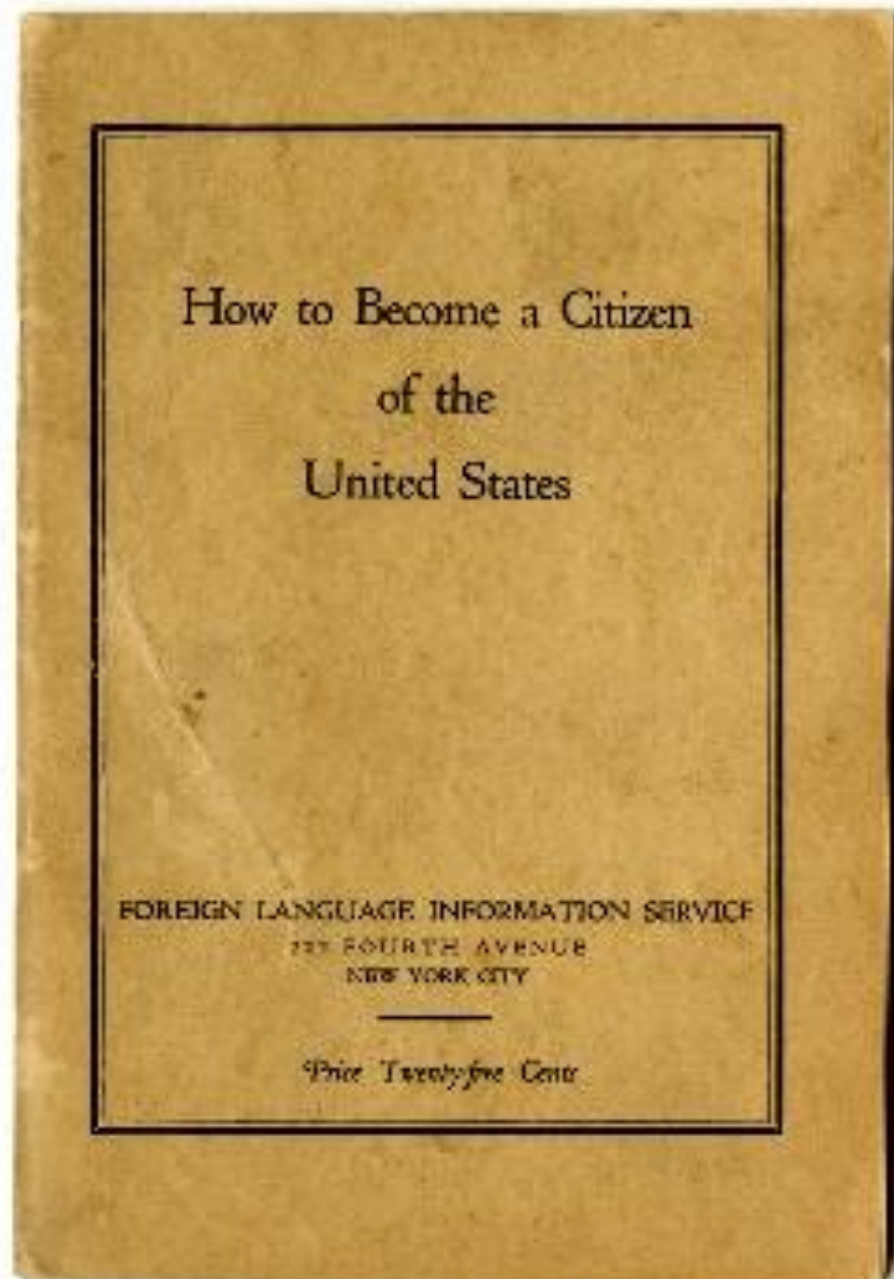
Liberty Banner, 1790s  
National Museum of American History



## Brochure, "How To Become A Citizen of the United States", 1926

Many people are born American and thus don't have to take a test or say an oath to become an American. However, individuals aspiring to be U.S. Citizens must take the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance.

What might be the purpose of this kind of oath? Brainstorm three things that you think individuals should have to say as part of their oath.



Brochure, "How to Become a Citizen of the United States," 1926  
National Museum of American History



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# United States Naturalization Oath of Allegiance

The United States Oath of Allegiance is taken by foreign-born people to become naturalized U.S. citizens. It is conducted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

For each line of the oath (1- 6) answer the following questions:

- In your own words, what does this line ask people to do?
- Why is this important to include in an oath of allegiance?
- How might this requirement help new citizens participate in American democracy and civic life?

I hereby declare, on oath, that...

1. I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty.

2. I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

3. I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States of America.

4. I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law.

5. I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law.

6. I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law.

I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.



## Recommended Revisions

You are a team of policy analysts that has been tasked with creating a recommendation to update the oath to be one that should be taken by both natural-born and naturalized citizens.

Use the space below to add to and edit the text. As you do this:

- Think about what engaged citizenship looks like to you.
- Decide which pieces should stay.
- Revise or remove pieces that you feel are outdated.
- Write in additional lines that you feel are missing.

I hereby declare, on oath, that...

1. I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty.
2. I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic.
3. I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States of America.
4. I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law.
5. I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law.
6. I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law.

I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

