

What makes a good citizen?

Subject: Government

Topic: Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Grade: 11th

Time: One or two regular block classes

Materials:

- 2016 Connecticut Civic Health Data graphs
- Notebooks and Pens/pencils
- *The Gardens of Democracy* Chapter 3

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Identify characteristics of a good citizen.
- Evaluate data to determine the “citizenship health” of our state.
- Compare and contrast what they identified as the characteristics of a good citizen with the indicators of good citizenship from the Connecticut Citizenship Health Survey.

Compelling question: *How would the quality of life for everyone in Connecticut improve if residents were more actively involved citizens?*

Activity 1: What is a good citizen?

Ask students to pair-up and to list ten characteristics or behaviors of a good citizen. *What do you think makes a good citizen? Why?*

Have each pair of students join with another pair to make groups of four.

Ask groups to discuss both of their lists, evaluating each characteristic/behavior they identified.

Ask each group of four to create a new combined list that reflects the best ideas from both original lists.

Activity 2: Making predictions

With students working in their groups of four, ask them to use each characteristic or behavior from their new list and estimate the percentage of adult Connecticut citizens they think exhibit these characteristics or behaviors.

Create a new combined list that reflects the best ideas from both original lists.

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Activity 3: Evaluating the data

As a class, discuss the students' conclusions.

Questions:

1. *What are the most important characteristics of good citizenship?*
Make a master list.
2. *How do Connecticut adults measure up as active, involved citizens?*
3. *What advice would students give to adults of our state about how to be better citizens?*
4. *Are there specific actions that citizens can take that would improve the quality of life for all in our state?*
5. *Although they are not yet adults, students too are citizens. What can they, as students, do to be better citizens and improve the quality of life in Connecticut?*

Conclusion: connecting “great citizenship,” “civic health,” and Economic Resilience for Stronger Communities

Share with the students data and information from the NCoC studies “Civic Health and Unemployment” and “Civic Health and Unemployment II: the Case Builds” on how strong civic health (civic participation) makes communities more resilient and vibrant.

Class Discussion

Again, while on groups of four, as students to examine and discuss the data from the **2016 Connecticut Civic Health Index Report**.

Questions:

1. *Are any characteristics/behavior of citizenship identified in the report the same or similar to those you identified?*
2. *What percentage of adult Connecticut citizens exhibited those characteristics or behaviors in the report?*
3. *How does the data compare to your predictions?*
4. *Are there indicators of great citizenship identified in the report?*
5. *Are there any indicators in the report that you did not include in your lists?*
6. *Do you think those are important indicators of great citizenship? Why or why not?*

Homework: To extend students' thinking about citizenship, assign them to read Chapter 3 “Great Citizenship – Society Becomes How You Behave” from Eric Liu’s book *The Gardens of Democracy* for tomorrow’s class.

Assessment: Students will be assessed on their participation (both actively listening and contributing ideas) in pair, small group and full class discussion.

Considering “great citizenship” through a Discussion on The Gardens of Democracy

Subject: Government

Topic: Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Grade: 11th

Time: One or two regular block classes

Materials:

- 3 x5 index cards
- Cut 12 strips of paper each with a question for the extended class discussion. Number each slip.
- *The Gardens of Democracy* Ch. 3

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Identify characteristics of a good citizen.
- Evaluate Eric Liu’s ideas about citizenship from Chapter 3 of *The Gardens of Democracy*.
- Write a letter to the editor encouraging state residents to be more actively involved citizens.

Compelling question: *How would the quality of life for everyone in Connecticut improve if residents were more actively involved citizens?*

Introductory Activity

Hand each student a 3” x 5” card as they enter class and ask them to write:

1. Their name
2. One idea about citizenship from their homework reading (Chapter 3 “Great Citizenship – Society Becomes How You Behave” from Eric Liu’s book *The Gardens of Democracy*) that they found particularly interesting.
3. One question they would like to ask Mr. Liu regarding his ideas about citizenship.

Activity 2: Class Discussion

Using students’ ideas and questions written on their cards, lead a class discussion about Eric Liu’s ideas of democracy and citizenship.

Activity 3: Extending the Discussion

Group students into pairs and give each group one slip of paper with a question to consider. Ask them to discuss the question with their partner(s) and then write a group answer. In order of question number, ask each pair to share their question, their answer and to elaborate on their answer. Provide time for others in the class to question or comment on their answer.

Questions (in paper slips):

1. Do you agree with Mr. Liu that “not my problem is a problem”? Why or why not?
2. The author says that “By ‘citizenship’ we do not mean legal documentation status. We mean living in a pro-social way at every scale of life. We mean showing up for each other.” What does it mean to “live in a pro-social way” and to “show up for each other”?
3. Mr. Liu says that “being a citizen is not just about serving others and contributing when it’s convenient but also when it is not convenient.” Can you give examples of people you know who serve others when it is not convenient?
4. Mr. Liu says that “citizenship is a recognition that we are interdependent – that there are values, systems, and skills that hold us together as social animals, particularly in a tolerant, multi-ethnic market democracy.” Are we “interdependent”, “social animals”?
5. Look at the chart on pages 56-57, “Humans are intrinsically individualistic” and the chart on page 58-59, “Humans are intrinsically social”. Which chart best describes you, your friends and the other “citizens” you know? Which chart best describes the society you want to live in?
6. What does Mr. Liu mean by “contagions”? How do contagions affect society?
7. Mr. Liu says that “Society becomes how you behave – not anyone else but you.” You may have seen the quote or bumper sticker often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” Is there a relationship between this quote and Mr. Liu’s idea of citizenship?

8. Mr. Liu quotes Robert Putnam, “Bridging social capital is better than bonding. Great citizens build bridges between unacquainted realms, more than reinforcing bonds among people already close.” *Can you give examples of people you know, perhaps friends, who build bridges between people or groups they are not like or not close to in addition to just bonding with people they are like or are close to?*
9. *What is Dunbar’s number and how is it related to society? How does Mr. Liu relate this to citizenship?*
10. *What are examples of courtesy? Why does Mr. Liu feel this is an essential element of citizenship?*
11. *Why does Mr. Liu feel trust is essential to good citizenship?*
12. *What is the message of the illustration titled “Counter-intuition: yielding = advance” on page 71 How does this relate to Mr. Liu’s ideas about citizenship?*

Activity 3: Taking Action (A Letter to the Editor)

Remind students that yesterday they worked in groups to create lists of characteristics or behaviors that they thought good citizens exhibited. Then they looked at the Connecticut Citizenship Health Survey that included many indicators related to citizenship and the percentage of Connecticut citizens who demonstrated those characteristics. Last night they read a chapter from *The Gardens of Democracy* that included some other ideas about citizenship and today they discussed those ideas in class.

1. Ask students to work with their original partners to write a letter to the editor of a state newspaper identifying what they see as the most important elements of good citizenship and encouraging our state’s residents to become better, more actively involved citizens.

Ask students to include how this would improve the quality of life for everyone in the state. Explain that you intend to mail the most convincing and well written letters to newspapers for possible publication.

2. For extra credit, suggest that student pairs create a Twitter tweet that summarizes the most important ideas from their letters to the editor. Since tweets are limited to 140 characters, students will need to select critical points from their letters and be judicious in their use of words to convey their ideas.

Assessment: Students will be assessed on...

1. Their responses on the 3 x 5 cards at the beginning of class to determine whether or not they completed the homework reading.
2. Their participation (both actively listening and contributing ideas) in pair and full class discussion.
3. Their Letters to the Editor defining and encouraging good citizenship.

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Lesson Plans 1 & 2 Links and Materials

National Conference on Citizenship (2011). "Civic Health and Unemployment." Washington D.C.: <http://www.ncoc.net/unemployment>

National Conference on Citizenship (2012). "Civic Health and Unemployment II: the Case Builds." Washington D.C.: <http://ncoc.net/unemployment2>

Liu, Eric and Hanauer, Nick (2011). *The Gardens of Democracy*. Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books. <http://www.amazon.com/The-Gardens-Democracy-Citizenship-Government/dp/1570618232>

Weightman, Craig (2012) "*Book Synopsis for The Gardens of Democracy*" (PDF): <http://everyday-democracy.org/gardens-of-democracy-summary>

Connecticut Civic Health Assessment Fact Sheet 2015 (PDF): <http://everyday-democracy.org/ct-civic-health-fact-sheet>

Connecticut Civic Health Topline Data Set (PDF): <http://everyday-democracy.org/ct-civic-health-data-set>