

WHAT YOUTH WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT CITIZENSHIP

If I were your age again, I think one of the first things I would want to know would be that citizenship is a part of my birthright and that I became a citizen the day I was born; and unless I committed some bad or evil deed against other persons or my country or voluntarily give up my birthright that it is one of my most valuable possessions.

American citizenship means that everybody in this country with some few exceptions, are members of this nation, along with more than 160,000,000 other persons who live in this country and that under the Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, we all have the same rights and privileges and also the same duties and obligations.

Let us go into some of the benefits of our birthright--this birthright of citizenship. What are some of the benefits which we enjoy because we are American citizens?

Citizenship permits us to live unmolested in our homes, where we begin to learn fundamental lessons which help us to live in a democratic society. The home is really a miniature nation; and in it we learn the elementary lessons that we will need all of our lives as citizens.

1. We learn to respect our love our fathers and mothers and our brothers and sisters.
2. We learn cooperation--to share work and to lend a helpful hand in the work of the home and in the work of the farm.
3. We learn to obey laws in our homes, for that is all the do's and don'ts of your parents mean. The advice and council of parents are all a part of the elementary training for citizenship. When we obey our parents and observe the regulations of our

homes we are learning to be good citizens.

4. We learn the moral codes in the home--what is right and what is wrong. We respect the personal property of the members of our family; we learn respect for the truth; honesty, good taste.

We youth then, one of the basic things we should know is that our homes are really training centers. Fortunate indeed is the young person who has good parents who can give him this basic home training.

Then about the age of six, sometimes earlier or later, we move to another center of training--the school. Here our circle of fellow citizens becomes wider and we begin to learn other lessons a good citizen should know--not only the skills of reading and writing and subject matter like history and geography and civics and mathematics but we learn how to become more useful and helpful, and we are assisted in other ways to become more proficient. In other words, school carries further the lessons already learned in the home and provides us with more basic training for citizenship.

The Church. I wonder if any of you realize what benefits as citizens we all have in being able to attend the church of our choice and to worship God in the way we see fit. This is one of the great heritages of American citizenship. The founders of the United States of America did not have this privilege. They knew what religious persecution meant and bequeathed to us the great privilege of religious freedom. Even today there are some countries where people cannot worship God as they wish; and where religious questions are still the cause of riots and revolutions.

The Community. And then we come to the larger community, which plays its parts in our citizenship development. As young people you are all members of some community or civic group. In your case, it is the 4-H clubs, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts all splendid organizations for helping you to become self-sufficient, useful citizens. I doubt if there is any other country in the whole world with an organization that does as much to help its young people toward responsible citizenship as your 4-H Clubs with its 4-point program.

I have been stressing some of the rights and privileges/^{that} you as citizens obtain from our country because of your birthright. And there are many more ~~that~~ I have not mentioned. But for every right and privilege there are corresponding duties and obligations. Let us see what some of them are:

1. As we move out into the larger community, we will have an opportunity to put into practice some of the things we have learned in the home, in the school, in our churches and in our clubs. One of the first obligations of a good citizen is not only to know the laws of the land, but to respect them. I wish you would think about the tremendous expense it takes to maintain jails, to pay the police for protecting our lives and our property, to maintain courts and prisons. Every state in the union has hundreds of jails and penitentiaries. If the persons who are in jails and in prisons had learned to be good citizens in their homes, at school, at church and in their clubs there would be no need to spend enormous sums in housing, feeding, clothing and caring for them we now spend. The money used for these bad men and women could be used for playgrounds and for parks and schools and hospitals and other constructive institutions. Good citizens need

no police, or courts or prisons. They know the law, respect it and obey it.

On the other hand, there are many so-called self-respecting people who would resent being classed as lawbreakers or as criminals but who by their thoughtlessness disregard the law; and do much to break down the morale of the communities in which they live. Many thousands of persons are killed yearly on our highways because supposedly good citizens disregard traffic laws. A good citizen does not cheat a few seconds on the traffic lights, but waits until the light turns green. Many communities go to great expense to maintain traffic signals at dangerous crossings; but thoughtless citizens overlook the signals and not only run over them but even do damage to them.

2. A good citizen pays his debts. To the average person, in terms of citizenship, this means he pays his taxes--federal tax, state tax, county tax, city tax. It is from these taxes that our schools and community and governments' institutions are supported. In time, you will have to pay these taxes just like your parents now have to pay them. But there are other debts other than taxes. A good citizen pays his debts when he promises to do so. To say a man is as good as his word is to say that he is a good citizen and is the kind of person communities like to have as residents. Better still, a good citizen does not make a debt unless he knows he can pay it.

3. A good citizen does his share in any emergency in his community. In the past, an emergency has meant shouldering of arms in defense of his county; but we are beginning to realize that wars do not settle differences between nations; and we all hope that none of you will ever have to go to war in defense of your country like other citizens have had to do in the recent past. If this is to be so, your task then, as good citizens, is to do all that you can to in-

sure an end to warfare and to usher in an era of permanent peace.

While we hope that war as a means of settling disputes has ended, there are numerous other calls on citizens for aid and help for the unfortunate. Most of you know of families in your communities whose homes have been destroyed by fire or by storms or floods or who have suffered some other dreadful catastrophe. If good citizens had not come to their aid, they would have had nowhere to turn. We can all help support with our money the Red Cross and other community agencies that come to the aid of the needy in times of distress. One of the fine things about America is that in time of need other citizens extend a generous hand and not only to fellow Americans but to persons not of American citizenship. Therefore, a good citizen is a generous citizen. A good citizen offers his services to any civic, religious or educational group which is working to make his community a better place.

4.. A good citizen must use his intelligence. Intelligence here means more than the ability to read and write. And in these days a boy or a girl is not being very intelligent if he drops out of school before he graduates. By intelligence here, I mean the ability to think clearly and constructively. It also includes also the ability to interpret correctly what he reads. Unfortunately, many people have a certain awe for the printed page and they allow not only newspapers but the radio and TV to do much of their thinking for them. But as good citizens we must understand that we cannot believe everything we see in print or everything that we hear. We must understand that in order to really understand the meaning of what is stated in the newspapers and over the air we must know not only what appears in print, but what was not printed; for many times, what a reporter or an editor leaves out

of the newspaper is more important than what he puts into it. Ofttimes the complete news is not printed. This is where good judgment and intelligence comes in.

5. A good citizen knows something about his local government. I wonder how many of you know who the sheriff of your county is, who is the probate judge, who is the tax collector? Do you know anything about your county welfare department or of your county school board. When in Washington, D. C. recently every day I saw large groups of school children visiting national shrines--the George Washington monument, the Library of Congress, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the House of Representatives, the Senate, the United States Supreme Court. They came from everywhere--from Alabama, from Tennessee, from Florida, from Texas. They went to the offices of the senators and representatives from their states and talked with them on public problems, both national and state. Now many of you cannot go to Washington, though I am sure some of you have been there, but you can visit your state capital and go to the state house of representatives and the senate and the govern's office. You can also visit the State Department of Agriculture and Industry and other government offices. And if Montgomery is too far, each^{of} you goes at some time to your county seat. Your teacher or your club leader I am sure will be glad to arrange for you to visit the county court house or the town hall in order to become informed about how your county and town government operates. If your leader requests it, I am sure your county officers will be glad to take you on a tour of your local government and to explain to you the government set-up. These things every good citizen should know.

6. Now most of the persons who govern your county--the sheriff, the judge, the tax collector, the county commissioners, the board of education and others do so by the will of the people of the county. They were in the main voted into office by the citizens. As a citizen, one of your most important duties is to register and to vote, so that you may help to select these officers.

In Alabama you cannot register to vote until you are twenty-one years old, but you can learn all that you can about how to register, how to vote, where to go to vote, and all the other things an intelligent citizen should know, so that when you do become twentyone you will know exactly how to register, to pay your poll tax and with other good and honest citizens help to fill your county, state and national officers with qualified persons who have vision and will consider the welfare of every citizen.

I hope you will remember that being a good citizen is a lifetime job and you who are 4-H club members can do much for your communities by living up to the highest standard of your organization and of your country.