

Rights & Responsibilities | Lesson Plan



What's the difference between a right, a responsibility, and a privilege—and what does each one ask of a citizen?

Students work as a paralegal at a law office help desk: they watch the Citizenship 101 episode “Rights & Responsibilities,” then learn the handbook by matching key terms (Level 1), triage incoming calls into rights, duties, and privileges and build the timeline of the four voting amendments (Level 2), give straight answers to callers trying to dodge a jury summons or vote at 17 (Level 3), and write the firm’s legal advice blog (Level 4)—climbing from recall to creation as they rise through the ranks.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key rights, responsibilities, and privileges of U.S. citizens, as tested on the official U.S. naturalization exam.
- Classify civic actions as rights, responsibilities, or privileges—distinguishing what is protected, what is required, and what is chosen —and complete the timeline of the four amendments that expanded who can vote.
- Apply the rules of citizenship—jury service, the voting age, and Selective Service—to realistic cases, citing the specific duty, right, or amendment that settles each one.
- Create a persuasive reply for the firm’s legal advice blog that explains what voting is (and isn’t), tells the story of who fought for the vote, and makes the case for participation.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Right:** A guaranteed freedom granted by God that no one—neither the government nor your neighbor—can take away.
- **Unalienable:** Unable to be taken away or given up; the Declaration of Independence says all people are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”
- **Responsibility:** A duty citizens must perform, such as serving on a jury when called and filing federal income taxes each year by April 15.
- **Privilege:** Something citizens may choose to do, such as voting in elections and running for office.
- **Jury:** A group of citizens who hear a court case; serving when called is a responsibility of citizenship.
- **Selective Service:** The registration required of nearly all men ages 18 through 25—citizens and immigrants alike—as a sign of willingness to serve the nation in times of conflict.
- **Poll tax:** A fee once required in order to vote, eliminated by the 24th Amendment in 1964 so that no one has to pay to cast a ballot.
- **Oath of Allegiance:** The promise naturalized citizens make to set aside allegiance to other nations, obey U.S. laws, and defend the Constitution.



Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.6

Academic Subject Areas: Civics, U.S. Government, U.S. History

What You'll Need

- Video: Citizenship 101: "Rights & Responsibilities" ([Watch Here](#))
- Worksheet: Citizenship 101: Rights & Responsibilities (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencils, whiteboard or projector

Lesson Plan (45–55 minutes)

Warm Up: The Beach Trip Problem (5–7 minutes)

- Open cold with a dilemma (display or read aloud): *Your jury summons arrives the same week as your family beach trip. Do you have to go? Take a hand-poll: Yes / No / It's optional. Don't settle it yet—the episode will.*
- Follow with three rapid-fire questions students jot silently: *Who can vote in federal elections, run for federal office, and serve on a jury in the United States? Why is it important to pay federal taxes? There are four amendments to the U.S. Constitution about who can vote—describe one of them.*
- Reveal: All three are real questions from the U.S. naturalization test.
- Deliver the twist: "Today you're the new help desk paralegal at a law firm. Confused Americans call your line all day—some want to know their rights, some are dodging their duties—and by the end of the day, you'll be writing the firm's advice blog."

Help Desk Orientation: Watch and Learn the Handbook (12–15 minutes)

- Distribute the worksheet (one per student). **Preview Level 1 | New Hire:** students complete the Level 1 matching activity as they watch the "Rights & Responsibilities" video. Every term and meaning is covered directly in the episode.
- **Help desk briefing** (direct instruction, 2 minutes): Before pressing play, frame the big distinction. A right is a freedom granted by God that no one can take away—that's why the Declaration calls our rights "unalienable." But citizenship isn't only about what you receive: some things are required of citizens, and some are privileges citizens choose to use. Ask students to watch for the following in the episode:
 - The freedoms the Constitution protects—and where the Declaration says rights come from.
 - The two responsibilities required of U.S. citizens—and the famous April deadline.
 - What changed with the 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments.
 - What men must do at 18, and what naturalized citizens promise in the Oath of Allegiance.
- Watch Citizenship 101: "Rights & Responsibilities" (6 minutes, 24 seconds).
- Give students 1–2 minutes to finish the matching with a partner, then rapid-check the letters as a class—the handbook must be airtight before the phones open.

The Inbox: Triage the Calls (8–10 minutes)

- Students move to **Level 2 | The Inbox**: six cases must each be marked R (right), D (duty), or P (privilege), followed by The Vote File, a timeline of the four voting amendments. Work in pairs so staffers must defend their triage to a colleague.
- **Teacher guardrails for this section:**
 - **Don't confirm the answers yet.** Let pairs commit to all six before reviewing; disagreement between partners is where the learning happens.
 - **Watch for the trap case.** Case 6—voting—is the one students miss. The right to vote is protected by amendments, but voting is not required: the episode calls it a privilege citizens choose to use. Students must separate “protected” from “required.”
 - **Point out the timeline's direction.** Across a century, eligibility only expanded—race, sex, wealth, and age barriers each fell, “in keeping with the spirit of our founding.”

The Hard Cases: Senior Staff (8–10 minutes)

- Students advance to **Level 3 | Senior Staff**: three callers looking for a way out—the jury-summons dodger, the eager 17-year-old voter, and the new 18-year-old who's heard about “registering for something.” For each, students give a straight answer and cite the rule that settles it.
- **Key idea to surface:** a help desk answer cites the rule, not just the outcome. “Jury service is a responsibility of citizenship” beats “you just have to go.” Sympathy for the beach trip is allowed; the duty stands anyway.
- **Optional live version (if time allows):** run the help desk hotline—the teacher voices additional callers (“I'm being told I can't vote unless I pay a fee!” “Do I have to keep the religion my parents chose?”) and students respond in character with the answer plus the rule.

The Blog: “Dear Citizen” (5–8 minutes)

- Students complete **Level 4 | Legal Advice Blogger**: a 4–6-sentence reply to “Why should I bother voting if it's not even required?”—covering what voting is (and isn't), who fought for the vote, and why participation matters.
- Invite two or three bloggers to read their replies aloud. The strongest replies turn the question around: something so many Americans fought so hard to win is worth using.
- **Teacher tip: two extensions** for early finishers or a second day. (1) “What Disappears?”—students fold a paper into two panels and draw the same street corner twice: once with a freedom of their choice, once without it (no protest signs, no church, no free press). (2) Formal debate—“Should voting be required by law?” Two sides, with the episode's right / duty / privilege categories as the analytical frame: making voting a duty would change what kind of thing it is.

Wrap Up (3–5 minutes)

- Return to the warm-up dilemma: *the summons and the beach trip—who has to go?* Every hand should now answer with the rule, not a guess.
- Exit ticket (spoken or written): Name one right, one responsibility, and one privilege of U.S. citizens.

- **Success criteria:** A strong response places each example in the correct category—a protected freedom (religion, speech, bearing arms), a required duty (jury service, taxes), and a chosen privilege (voting, running for office)—showing the student can separate protected, required, and chosen.
- Collect worksheets as a formative assessment, or have students keep them as part of a citizenship-test study guide if you plan to use other episodes in the series.

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (25–30 minutes)

Hand out the worksheet and play the episode—the worksheet's "mission brief" gives students everything they need with no setup. Students complete Level 1 while watching and Levels 2–3 after; assign the Level 4 | Legal Advice Blogger reply as homework. Check triage against the answer key. (The worksheet is written directly to students as a mission, so it works handed out with the video alone—no lesson plan required.)