



What does it take to become an American—and what does the test of citizenship ask of those born here?

Students serve on the state Civics Commission, deciding whether students should pass the citizenship test to graduate: they watch the Citizenship 101 episode “U.S. Citizenship,” then learn the terms of the bill (Level 1), answer three constituents asking whether they can become citizens (Level 2), review the history of tests used as weapons—closing with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as a primary source (Level 3), and then the tables turn: no commissioner votes without passing the 10-question test at the real 60% standard before casting an evidence-based YEA or NAY (Level 4)—climbing from recall to creation as they rise through the ranks.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify what civics and naturalization mean, the requirements every applicant for U.S. citizenship must meet, and the history of civics testing in America.
- Apply the naturalization requirements to constituents’ letters, advising each writer—and distinguishing “not yet eligible” from permanently barred.
- Evaluate what separates a fair test from an unfair one—contrasting the exclusionary tests outlawed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with today’s public, identical, passable exam—and analyze Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as a primary source.
- Demonstrate mastery on a 10-question mock citizenship test at the real 60% passing standard—then construct an evidence-based recommendation on whether states should require it for graduation.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Civics:** The study of the rights and duties of citizens—the knowledge this whole series has been building.
- **Naturalization:** From “to make natural”—the legal process by which a person born in another country becomes a citizen of the United States.
- **The Basic Naturalization Act of 1906:** The law that standardized the naturalization process across the country.
- **Legal residency:** Living in the United States lawfully for the required number of years—a requirement that time can satisfy.
- **Good moral character:** A requirement for citizenship; an applicant convicted of murder or an aggravated felony is permanently barred.
- **Grandfather clause:** A rule that excused certain voters—in practice, white voters—from the very tests used to exclude black Americans from the ballot.
- **The Voting Rights Act of 1965:** The law that outlawed the exclusionary voting tests once used to keep Americans from voting.
- **The citizenship test:** The civics exam applicants must pass, drawn from a bank published in advance. The episode shows the earlier format—10 questions from a bank of 100, with 6



correct answers required to pass; today officers ask up to 20 from a bank of 128, with 12 correct answers required to pass—the same 60% bar.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.9, CCRA.W.1, 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: "U.S. Citizenship"* ([Watch Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Citizenship 101: U.S. Citizenship* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencils, whiteboard or projector; optional: simple "voting cards" for the closing vote

Lesson Plan (45–55 minutes)

Warm Up: One in Three (5–7 minutes)

- Display or read aloud: *Barely one in three Americans can name all three branches of government. Every immigrant who becomes a citizen has to know them cold.* Take the poll: *Could you pass the test they take?* Record the show of hands—students will answer for real by the end of class.
- Follow with three rapid-fire questions students jot silently: *What do we call the process of becoming a U.S. citizen? How many questions is the citizenship test—and how many must you get right? Name one requirement to become a citizen.*
- Reveal: None of these three is on the exam—they're about it. The episode shows an earlier version of the test; you'll learn today's rules—and sit the test yourself—before class ends.
- Deliver the twist: "You've been appointed to the state Civics Commission. One question is on the table: should every student pass the citizenship test to graduate? But be warned—no commissioner votes without passing the test first."

Commission Orientation: Watch and Learn the Rules (10–13 minutes)

- Distribute the worksheet (one per student). Preview Level 1 | New Commissioner: students complete the Level 1 matching activity as they watch the "U.S. Citizenship" video. Every term is covered directly in the episode.
- **Commissioner's briefing (direct instruction, 2 minutes):** Before pressing play, frame the stakes. Citizenship has never been automatic—and for too long in American history, "tests" were used to keep citizens out, not welcome them in. Today's process has clear rules, known in advance, the same for everyone. Ask students to watch for the following in the episode:
 - What "civics" and "naturalization" mean.
 - The requirements every applicant must meet—and the one conviction that bars an applicant permanently.
 - How the test works—and note for later: the episode shows the earlier version of the exam.
 - The story of the old voting tests—and the 1965 law that ended them.
- Watch *Citizenship 101: "U.S. Citizenship"* (5 minutes, 29 seconds).

- Give students 1–2 minutes to finish the matching with a partner, then quickly check the letters as a class—the rulebook must be airtight before the files open.

The Constituent Desk: Answer the Mail (8–10 minutes)

- Students move to Level 2 | The Constituent Desk: three constituents' letters answered Eligible, Not Yet, or Barred—each answer justified by naming the requirement that decides it. Work in pairs so commissioners must defend their advice.
- **Teacher guardrails for this section:**
 - **Require the deciding requirement.** “Not enough years of legal residency” is a ruling; “he’s not ready” isn’t.
 - **Surface the key distinction.** Marcus’s problem (residency) is cured by time—Not Yet. Viktor (an aggravated felony) fails to show good moral character permanently—Barred. The difference between a waiting period and a closed door is the Level 3 idea hiding in a Level 2 chart.

The Review Board: Weapon or Door—and the Law (8–10 minutes)

- Students advance to **Level 3 | Review Board:** the case file on the post-Civil War voting tests (“name every county judge in the state”), the THEN/NOW contrast, and the primary source—Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—with close-read tasks.
- **Key idea to surface:** the same word—“test”—can describe opposite things. A test designed to be failed, applied unequally, is a weapon; a test designed to be passed—public questions, identical for all, free study materials, a passing bar set at 60%—is a door. Fairness lives in the design.
- **Read the law aloud.** Before the close-read, have a volunteer read the Section 2 excerpt aloud. One sentence of law ended a century of rigged tests—students should hear how little it takes when the words are right.

The Recommendation: But First, the Test (8–10 minutes)

- Students complete Level 4 | The Recommendation: a ten-question test drawn from the episode, passed at the real exam’s 60% standard—six of ten. Administer it like the real thing: silent, no notes, no worksheet-flipping. Then score against the answer key. Test update (tell students first): the episode shows the earlier exam—10 questions from a bank of 100, with 6 correct answers required to pass. Today, officers ask up to 20 questions from a public bank of 128, and 12 correct answers are required to pass. Same design—public questions, identical for everyone—and the same 60% bar their mock test uses.
- Follow with **the final ruling:** should states require this test for high school graduation? **Optional stance line:** label the room’s corners Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree; students stand in their corner and defend it with evidence from the episode before writing. Either stance earns credit—grade the reasoning.
- **Teacher tip:** for early finishers or as an extension, assign the **fair-or-unfair pair:** write one fair citizenship test question (answerable from public knowledge, same for everyone) and one deliberately unfair one in the style of the old tests—then explain what separates them. Students who can build both have mastered the episode’s deepest idea.

Wrap Up: The Commission Votes (4–6 minutes)

- Hold the vote: commissioners who passed receive their voting card (optional props, applause mandatory) and the class casts its recommendation—tally YEA and NAY on the board and compare with the warm-up poll. Students below six aren't shamed—real applicants get a second chance, and so do they: assign a retake after review; they vote on the retake.
- Return to the warm-up poll: *could you pass?* Now every student knows the answer.
- Exit ticket (spoken or written): What is naturalization, and what share of the test's questions must an applicant answer correctly to pass?
- **Success Criteria:** A strong response defines naturalization as the process by which a person born in another country becomes a U.S. citizen ("to make natural") and states the standard: 12 correct answers out of up to 20 questions—the same 60% bar as their mock test.
- Collect worksheets as a formative assessment—or, if students have completed other episodes in the series, have them staple the set together: they've built themselves a citizenship-test study guide.

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; then administer Level 4 | The Recommendation as a closed-notes test and score it together—6 out of 10, matching the real exam's 60% bar. (The worksheet is written directly to students as a mission, so it works handed out with the video alone—no lesson plan required.)