

SECTION 3

Citizens' Duties and Responsibilities

BEFORE YOU READ

The Main Idea

Along with the rights and freedoms of U.S. citizenship come important duties and responsibilities.

Reading Focus

1. What are the duties of citizenship?
2. What are the responsibilities of citizenship?

Key Terms

draft, *p. 125*
rationed, *p. 125*
jury duty, *p. 125*



These citizens proudly display their juror identification.

CIVICS IN PRACTICE

You have probably heard the saying, "There's no free lunch." That just means that you cannot get something for nothing. In almost any kind of relationship, there is some give and take. When this country was founded, citizens gave up some of their individual powers to the government. In return, the government agreed to protect the rights of citizens.

But the government is you. You must play your part, too. In order to ensure that your rights and freedoms are protected, you have duties and responsibilities to the country. You must be an informed, active, and involved citizen.

Duties of Citizenship

In return for having the privileges of a citizen, there are a few duties that a citizen must do. These duties are crucial to making our democratic government work.

Obeying the Law

Of course, we must all obey the laws of our land. What would happen if people didn't? Our society would quickly collapse. To obey

the laws, you have to know what the laws are. For example, if a police officer stops you for speeding, it probably will not help to claim that you did not know the speed limit. Why? It is your duty to find out what the speed limit is and to obey it.

Attending School

You have to go to school, at least until age 16. The United States highly values education. That is why we have free, public schools.

A democracy cannot function without educated citizens. People need good thinking skills so they can wisely choose their leaders. They must be able to read about and understand issues that affect us. Education also gives citizens the skills they need to join the workforce and help the economy grow.

Paying Taxes

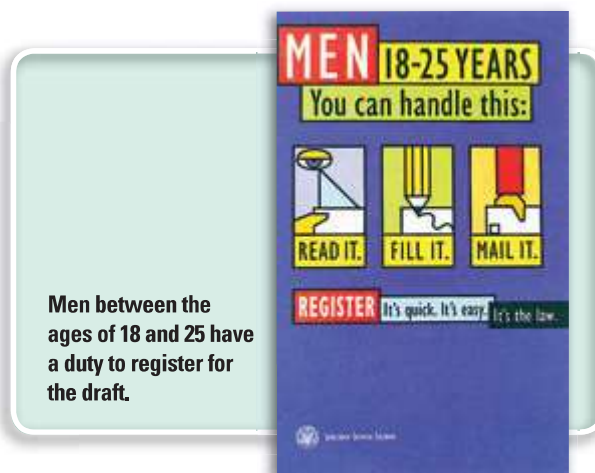
If you work, you probably have to pay taxes. When you buy things, you probably have to pay taxes. Almost nobody escapes them. We might not love paying taxes, but we enjoy the services that our tax money buys. Taxes pay for police and fire protection and countless other services. When you drive down a paved street, go to school, or turn on an electric light, you are seeing the results of taxes you pay. Tax money also pays the huge costs of national security and defense.

Serving in the Armed Forces

Whenever America has been threatened, its citizens have come together to defend it. In the American Revolution, volunteers formed militias, or armies, to fight the British. Volunteers have fought in every war in U.S. history.

When the country has needed huge numbers of soldiers, it sometimes has had to establish a **draft**. Draft laws require men of certain ages and qualifications to serve in the military. Such laws have generally been put into effect during times of war.

The United States has not had a draft since 1973, during the Vietnam War. Since then, the armed forces have used only volunteers

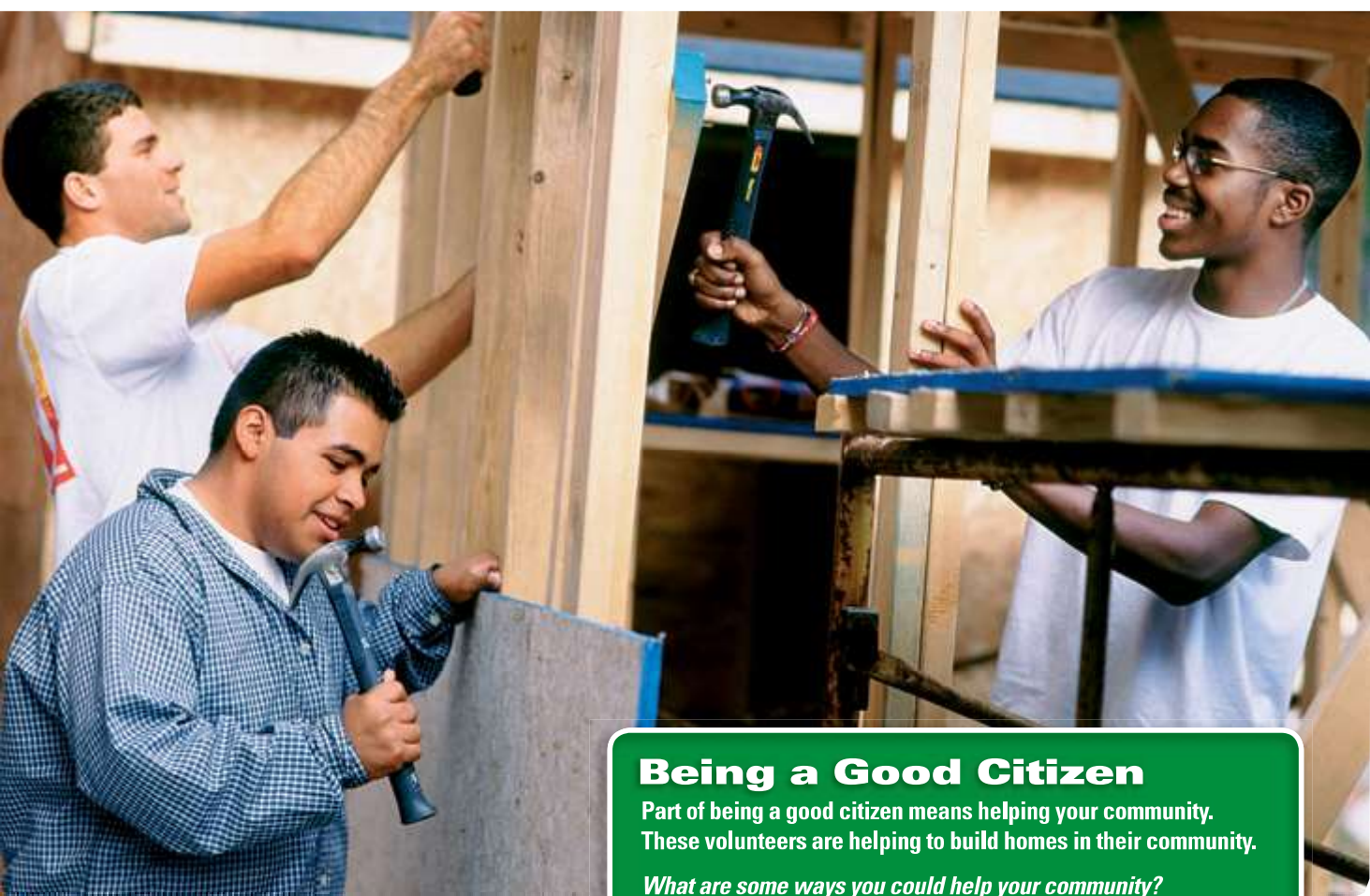


to fight wars. However, 18-year-old men must still register to serve in the military if they meet the qualifications for service. The registration process allows the government to keep track of the names and addresses of all men of draft age. Registration ensures that if a war or other crisis requires that the country quickly expand its armed forces, a draft could be launched again.

Although only some men must serve in the armed forces, other citizens have been called on to help protect the country. During World War II, Americans at home had to give up or cut back their use of various supplies needed for the troops overseas. Butter, sugar, beef, coffee, gasoline, and cloth were **rationed**, or limited by law to a certain amount per household.

Appearing in Court

Citizens must report to serve as members of a jury, if they are called to do so. This responsibility is called **jury duty**. Jury duty often involves sacrifice. Many citizens must take time off work to serve on a jury, and they are paid very small sums for their time. Why do we ask people to make this sacrifice? The Constitution guarantees citizens the right to a trial by jury of their peers—that is, their fellow citizens. Citizens must also testify in court if called as witnesses. For our system of justice to function, citizens must fulfill their duty to serve on juries and appear as witnesses.



Being a Good Citizen

Part of being a good citizen means helping your community. These volunteers are helping to build homes in their community.

What are some ways you could help your community?

Responsibilities of Citizenship

The duties of citizenship are the things we *must* do. There are other things we *should* do as citizens. These tasks are not required by law, yet most Americans accept them as their responsibility. A few of them are listed below.

Voting

American editor and drama critic George Jean Nathan once said, “Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.” If you do not vote, you leave the choice up to others—and you might not like the candidate they choose. Another way of putting this is the familiar phrase, “If you don’t vote, don’t complain about the results.”

Many people throughout our history gave their lives so that all citizens could vote. That makes voting not only an honor, but also a responsibility. Our government is based on the consent, or the approval, of the

governed. Therefore, we must let our legislators know when we approve or disapprove of their actions. We do that by voting for people whose views we support and who we believe to be good, honest candidates. The first step in voting is to know what you are voting on.

Being Informed

To cast your vote wisely, you must be well informed about candidates, current events, and key issues. That involves taking an interest in the programs and activities of the government. You also have a responsibility to tell your representatives what you think about topics of public concern.

Taking Part in Government

Some people watch a basketball game. Other people play the game. Being informed is just the start of participating in government. We also need people who will join political parties and help shape their positions on issues. We need citizens who will lead, who will educate others, and who will influence public opinion.

We especially need people willing to run for political office and serve wisely if elected. The quality of any democratic government depends on the quality of the people who serve in it.

Helping Your Community

One of the most important ways to be a responsible citizen is to take pride in your community. In addition, you should make sure that your community can take pride in you and your actions.

Have you ever volunteered to help your community? There are so many ways to help, from giving your time at the public library to participating in a walk for hunger. Citizens should volunteer to improve their communities. The government cannot be aware of every small problem, much less fix them all. Yet solving small problems is something volunteers can do in many ways. Think of how small acts of kindness—such as planting a tree, cheering up a sick person, or caring for a stray animal—make community life better.

Volunteering, just like voting, is a serious responsibility. It can also be a lot of fun. Almost everyone can find a way to help out in the community.

Respecting and Protecting Others' Rights

The lasting success and the strength of the United States depends on the protection of the rights of its citizens. You can play an important role in protecting these priceless rights. The first step is knowing your own rights as an American citizen. Then remember that the people around you share those same rights. By knowing what rights all people share, you can be sure to respect those rights. For example, it is essential that community members respect others' property. You should also know when people's rights are being violated. You have a responsibility to help protect the rights of others, just as you would want them to defend your rights.

All Americans must help defend human rights. Only then can the country truly have, in Abraham Lincoln's words, a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." As one of the people, you have the responsibility to help make sure that our society works for everyone.