

Lesson 2

Citizenship Skills



Key Terms

balance
cooperation
fairness
patience
respect
strength
self-improvement

What You Will Learn to Do

- Hypothesize what our country would be like without the seven citizenship skills

Linked Core Abilities

- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Define the seven *You the People* citizenship skills
- Relate the seven *You the People* citizenship skills to the Preamble of the Constitution
- Explain the relationship between the citizenship skills and effective teamwork
- Define key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

The Preamble to the United States Constitution sets the stage for the success of our nation. Individual values, which are also important to the success of our nation, are inferred from the Preamble and are called Citizenship Skills in the Cadet Citizenship Training Program. These Citizenship Skills are basic human values envisioned by

the Founding Fathers when they drafted the Constitution. This lesson explores the relationship between the values described in the Preamble and the seven Citizenship Skills to which you will be introduced.

You the People Educational Programs are designed to train Americans to make their nation truly a country of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Within this overall mission, the *Cadet Citizenship Training Program* is designed to help cadets:

- **Better understand the development of the United States system of government**
- **Learn the mechanics of how government works in the United States through hands-on exercises and experiences**
- **Develop interpersonal skills that will assist them throughout their personal and professional lives**

The primary teaching tool for this training program is the Citizen Action Group Process. The purpose of this group is to help cadets become effective citizens while guiding the governmental activity in their school, town, state, and country as the Founders of the United States of America envisioned.

After completing this course, cadets will be better educated and trained to effectively participate in their local, state, and federal governments by voting and by other means (for example, attending meetings, communicating effectively with representatives, and invoking change in their community).

You the Citizen

The Declaration of Independence established the ideals upon which this nation is based: freedom, equality, and unity. These ideals provide our country with a common theme.

The Constitution was written so that every American citizen is given equal opportunity to pursue these ideals. Only by exercising our rights as citizens can we enhance our governmental ideals of freedom, equality, and unity.

After you have registered to vote, you hold the highest office in America. You are the one who elects those representatives who go to Washington, D.C. and administer the government (see Figure 1.2.1). It is your tax money those representatives decide how to spend.

The Constitution specifies that the people rule the American government. American citizens, on paper, hold the ultimate power in this nation. While it appears that the President holds the highest office in this nation, as American citizens we really do. The President works for us.

How will you use your power as a registered voter? Do you care about this responsibility? Will you vote regularly? In what other ways (in addition to voting) will you participate?

Figure 1.2.1: Voting is a right and responsibility.

Courtesy of David Butow/
Corbis SABA.



Your answers to these questions will determine what kind of life you will have as well as what quality of life you will pass to your children and your children's children.

How can you become a more effective citizen of this country? The best way is to educate yourself.

The *You the People* text is organized into two main sections, each with corresponding exercises and classroom activities:

- **Citizenship Skill Development.** To become an effective citizen you must develop certain skills or values that were well known to the Founders of our nation. Most of us have forgotten or have never learned these skills. This section provides an overview of the skills.
- **Citizen Action Group Process.** This section forms the core of the *You the People* Educational Series: a pro-active group process known as the Citizen Action Group Process. This process may be the future of democracy in America. Several types of these groups are already developing through grassroots organizations in many communities across the nation, perhaps even your own. In this section, you will get a chance to practice being a member of a Citizen Action Group and address issues that may concern you or others in your school. With this knowledge and experience, you can then decide how you want to participate at the next level, in your own communities.

The following section introduces you to Citizenship Skill Development.

Citizenship Skill Development

As you learned in the previous lesson, the Preamble to the United States Constitution sets the stage for the success of our nation. Individual values, which are also important to the success of our nation, are inferred from the Preamble and are called citizenship skills in this Cadet Citizenship Training Program. These citizenship skills are basic human values the Founding Fathers envisioned when they drafted the Constitution.

The Preamble to the United States Constitution

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Our government is based upon seven main citizenship skills. These individual skills are also interdependent; that is, to practice one skill you will need to use the others as well.

The Seven Citizenship Skills

The seven citizenship skills include:

Skill 1: Cooperation—“We the people,” not we the individuals; work together as a group.

Skill 2: Patience—A “more” perfect union; take progressive steps towards a better situation.

Skill 3: Fairness—“Establish justice;” consider the common good as well as individual desires.

Skill 4: Respect—“Insure domestic tranquility;” accept your fellow citizens.

Skill 5: Strength—“Provide for the common defense;” stand up for what is right, denounce what is wrong, and admit your mistakes.

Skill 6: Self-improvement—“Promote the general welfare;” seek knowledge and skills.

Skill 7: Balance—“Secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity;” support our nation’s ideals (freedom, equality, and unity) by harmonizing or compromising solutions to our problems.

Skill 1: Cooperation

The Preamble to the Constitution states “We the people,” not we the individuals. The premise here is that we can rule more effectively if we cooperate as a group to solve problems. In some instances, this might mean looking out for the common goals of the group at the expense of personal desires.

Cooperation involves thinking, as a group with each person trying to help the group in whatever way is best given the time and circumstances involved. Properly done, cooperative efforts can be more efficient and more successful than individual efforts. To accomplish this, however, people need an attitude of working together to achieve a common goal.

For example, a new student joined a science class that was undertaking a major research project to monitor the water quality of a nearby river. The instructor asked the class to include this new student in their project. Because she was not trained in collecting and recording water quality samples, an easy solution would have been to assign her a minor role. However, a group of students offered to spend their own

Key Note Term

cooperation—the art of working together as a group towards a common goal; cooperation is shown in an attitude of group awareness and willingness to help each other reach a common goal

Figure 1.2.2: The Canada goose is an example of cooperation.

Courtesy of Chase Swift/Corbis Images.



time, after school, to train her. They knew their project would be enhanced if they had another trained sampler who could collect valid samples from an additional location along the river.

The students' efforts are an example of a cooperative attitude. They did this extra work to help the overall purpose of the class research project.

Cooperation does not mean, however, we give up our beliefs and opinions for the good of the group or to support a poor idea. Instead, cooperation uses individual talents to obtain the very best group results.

It follows the popular saying: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. When we cooperate using everyone's best talents, the group is more powerful than all the individual efforts.

Cooperation is an important citizenship skill because any nation of, by, and for the people must work together. If we can truly govern ourselves, we have to be willing to subordinate some of our individual desires so that the whole (our country) operates efficiently and effectively.

Cooperation is an active skill based upon a common purpose and common goals to achieve that purpose. The students in the example above were aware of the common purpose of the research project (to collect valid data) and recognized this purpose could be enhanced if they had another trained person taking samples from an additional location. Their actions were in support of this purpose.

Cooperation is important to achieving the rights promised to us in the Declaration of Independence (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). Cooperation also supports peaceful coexistence. Cooperation means, among other things, helping others to see your point of view or helping them to clarify their own point of view. Without cooperation, humans break down into bickering, small groups, constantly fighting each other, as many societies have done all too often. Sometimes, cooperation is necessary for survival.

For example, geese fly in a “V” formation for a specific reason (see Figure 1.2.2). Scientists have found that each goose receives uplift from the one in front. By flying this way, geese extend their flying distances by more than 70 percent. Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it quickly feels the drag of flying alone and joins the formation again. The honks from behind encourage the leader to maintain the pace. When the leader is tired, it moves to the rear and a goose near the front takes over. If a goose lands for a rest or is injured, two or three from the flock will land with it and wait until the tired goose is able to fly again or dies; then they will fly together in a smaller “V” formation until they catch up with a larger flock. The flock depends on each goose cooperating and working together.

Skill 2: Patience

The Founding Fathers’ goal was to form a more perfect union. The Articles of Confederation were not working well at the time and the Founders wanted to improve this design of government in the Constitution. In so doing, they were working toward a more perfect situation in our government.

The **patience** citizenship skill illustrates this idea of progressing toward a more perfect situation. Patience is knowing when it is best to wait, when it is best to act, and how much action one should take based on the circumstances. It is both an active and a passive skill.

One example of the use of patience in our nation’s history is the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Why was the Declaration signed in 1776? Why not after the Stamp Acts or the Boston Massacre?

The Founding Fathers had been preparing for independence for some years before 1776. Committees of Correspondence had been formed, ammunition and weapons were being stockpiled, and political discussions were ongoing.

These preparations helped the independence movement. The Founders knew that independence from England would probably mean war. War required soldiers and the new colonies did not have a draft. Anti-English sentiment had to be widespread among the people, not just the political leaders of that time. Enough American colonists had to feel so strongly about their freedom that they would fight for it.

The Founders’ preparations encouraged the anti-English feelings in 1776. Before this time the Founders were unsure if enough American colonists were ready to fight. Waiting until after 1776 provided too many unknowns. The English oppressions might lessen, thereby reducing the colonists’ strong desire for freedom, or English oppressions might escalate, making the colonists’ desire for freedom even stronger.

Therefore, the Founders felt the time was “ripe” for declaring independence in 1776, and they acted accordingly. They were successful because they used the patience citizenship skill effectively.

Patience is not just waiting for something; it is knowing when is the right time to act. In other words, patience is knowing when to act and when to wait. You have probably been told sometime in your life to be patient, to wait. Practicing the patience citizenship skill means waiting for something, as the Founders did when they waited for the right time to declare independence from England.

Key Note Term

patience—the skill of knowing the proper timing for acting on an idea or decision

Patience is one of the most difficult skills to practice. Sometimes we do not like to wait because we have been programmed by our culture to receive instant gratification. In addition, sometimes we like to “tune out” the world and watch it go by. In both cases, we are not using the patience citizenship skill effectively.

Skill 3: Fairness

Establishing justice, which the citizenship skill of fairness is about, involves balancing individual desires with the common good. This is a tricky balance to maintain and why we have a unique Supreme Court. Our justice system is based on following the spirit of the law. In turn, the laws are based on the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

We elect representatives and judges (in most cases) who then create and execute the laws of our country. A sense of **fairness** within ourselves is important if we are to pick the right people to make and enforce these laws.

The United States’ ideal of “equality” is a good illustration of the fairness citizenship skill. Under our Constitution, we citizens are encouraged to grow as individuals, but we must also promote equality so that all people have an equal opportunity to grow as well.

The method our government has chosen to promote equality has some inherent conflicts. Similar to most methods, there are two ways of looking at the promotion of equality: Do we promote individual opportunity or do we focus on bringing everyone up to the same level? In other words, do we look at the “form” of a person (that is, their race, religion, economic status) or do we look at both the “form” and “substance” when promoting opportunity, where “substance” is how much education the person has, how qualified that person is for the job, and so on.

One way equality can be achieved is if there’s balance between the two ways (form and substance), allowing equal opportunity while maintaining objective standards for promotion—balancing individual desires against the common good for the nation as a whole. That is where fairness comes in.

Fairness means we constantly measure our individual desires against what is in the best interest of others and the majority of people around us.

Skill 4: Respect

The Preamble to the Constitution states “. . . insure domestic tranquility. . . .” This can be a challenge in a diverse country like the United States. This nation has a wide mix of cultures, races, and religions. We have achieved togetherness within this diversity because we have common ideals (see Figure 1.2.3). The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are based upon our common ideals of freedom, equality, and unity.

To work toward these ideals, our nation must learn to accept and incorporate the various differences in our society. To do otherwise is to resort to fighting wars over these differences.

Our institutions and laws are designed to ensure, as much as possible, that our government works together so that we rule as one unified body. To be unified, however, we must recognize each other as being equal and deserving of **respect**.

Key Note Term

fairness—the act of tempering individual desires with the needs of society as a whole

Key Note Term

respect—accepting the differences in others and honoring those differences



Figure 1.2.3: Common goals and ideals bind all cultures.

Courtesy of Steve Chenn/Corbis Images.

Think of respect as having acceptance of others, not necessarily love for each other. Nice though it may be, loving everyone is difficult to achieve. We all evaluate others. The difference is how we act on these evaluations. That is where respect comes in.

Respect is a critical citizenship skill for any nation with our ideals (freedom, equality, and unity). If we can respect each other with all our differences, we will feel secure enough to state our ideas and opinions to each other. Everyone's opinion matters and deserves to be heard no matter how much we may disagree with it.

Respect is especially important to the Citizen Action Group Process introduced in this Cadet Citizenship Training Program. Without it, this group process might be stymied or dominated by one person or a group of persons. Respect allows cooperative communication to take place.

As you practice the respect citizenship skill, you may need to evaluate those around you based on their skills rather than on any personal or preconceived judgments. Respect for each other encourages participation, and participation is needed to keep our country alive. Participation is also vital to the Citizen Action Group Process.

Skill 5: Strength

The Preamble included the need for common defense, which refers to national **strength**. To be strong nationally, we must have a nation of citizens with strong convictions.

The strength citizenship skill involves the ability to stand up for what you believe (based on factual evidence and/or your values) even in the face of strong opposition. Strength is the main skill in the drug awareness program, D.A.R.E.

Key Note Term

strength—the willingness of citizens to stand up for what they believe in, to denounce what's wrong, and to admit when they've made a mistake

Strength is saying “no” when you mean “no” and “yes” when you mean “yes.”
Strength is a skill that challenges all of us.

We humans, it seems, are born with a “fear of rejection” (among other fears) written on our birth certificates. Students and adults alike all want to be accepted and liked by others. In addition, it is precisely the fear of not being accepted that keeps us from standing up for what we believe in. We are afraid if we say something others disagree with, they will not like us.

Consequently we tend to do one of two things: either we say nothing or we go along with our friends even when we do not agree. This is the working definition of peer pressure. We want our friends to like us. This is human.

We are not using the strength citizenship skill when we buckle under to peer pressure that ultimately hurts others and ourselves. We can be so afraid of “making waves” we will do what the group wants even if we do not believe in it. To the extreme, this can become dangerous. In political terms, it can lead to a dictatorship.

Germany had a democratic government in the 1920’s, but by the 1930’s, it was ruled by a dictator who imprisoned and executed millions of men, women, and children simply because of their race, religion, or disability. What happened? Part of it was unwillingness for people to denounce what was wrong. Unfortunately, there are countless other examples like this throughout history.

For our government to succeed, we need a nation composed of people willing to stand up for what they believe in and to denounce what is wrong.

Stand by your beliefs. Do not be afraid to say what you think, even if it might be construed as uncooperative. If you do it in a way that honors those who are listening, you will not come across as uncooperative.

Try also to be strong enough to allow others the same freedom—to have and hold their own beliefs. The greatest strength in many cases is the strength to admit when you have made a mistake.

For example, suppose you have told a joke you think is funny to someone who felt insulted by your joke. This joke poked fun at a particular ethnic group. You find out that this person belongs to that ethnic group. It takes great strength to admit that you were wrong and your joke was in poor taste.

Skill 6: Self-Improvement

“Promoting the general welfare,” as the Preamble states, gives all of us the freedom to learn and work as we want. The Founding Fathers hoped that this would create a prosperous nation; however, for our nation to be prosperous, we have to be willing to improve ourselves.

Self-improvement is the skill of educating and training yourself so that you can be the best at whatever you do. We tend to be a nation of achievers because most of us have had to work hard to be where we are today. In essence, this is part of our national personality. Thus, most of us want to be the best we can be at whatever we attempt, to pursue perfection without being perfectionists.

As humans, we are imperfect. We make mistakes. Mistakes and failures are part of self-improvement. Without mistakes, we might never know where we need to

Key Note Term

self-improvement—a desire to continually learn new skills and improve on others so that citizens can better serve themselves and those around them

improve. Being a perfectionist means being intolerable of mistakes. Although some of us tend to be perfectionists, this can be counter to the self-improvement citizenship skill.

Thomas Edison tried over 2,500 times before he was successful at inventing the light bulb. Each time he failed, he learned something that helped him on the next try.

That is what self-improvement is all about—looking at weaknesses and discovering where to improve. Weakness can be another term for challenges or obstacles. Self-improvement involves the willingness to overcome obstacles even in the face of hardships. It is looking at obstacles as opportunities for growth rather than as stopping places.

Our country gives everyone an equal chance for education through our public school system. This relates to the citizenship skill of self-improvement. Our country must have educated citizens to elect good representatives and participate in running the government.

The “American Dream” of becoming or doing what you want is also based on this self-improvement skill. If you want to change your career and/or go to college at age 40, you have the freedom in this country to make that choice.

Self-improvement means looking at everything you do, whether it is cleaning a toilet or writing a novel, and doing the very best you can at that task. To do this, you may need more education or training, or you may have to overcome some obstacles.

For example, if you want to be good at competitive sports you not only have to practice to become better, but you also have to overcome the obstacle of losing some games or matches and learn from those losses. From this learning, you then can become a more effective player.

Likewise, if you want to make good decisions on community or school issues, you need to educate yourself about those issues, be willing to make some mistakes (such as bad decisions), learn from those mistakes, and be willing to overcome the obstacle of interacting with others who might think differently than you.

Because self-improvement takes courage and perseverance (strength and patience citizenship skills), it can only be practiced when there is an overall ideal or purpose in mind.

The Declaration of Independence provided the overriding ideals for our country (freedom, equality, and unity). When we use the self-improvement skill as a citizen, we are helping our country work toward these ideals.

Skill 7: Balance

To secure the blessings of liberty (as mentioned in the Preamble), our nation must continue to follow the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. The key to following these ideals is to work through problems until we find the best solution for all involved. This requires **balance**—both nationally and individually.

Our nation, indeed our world, is made up of different people with differing ideas and ways. Throughout history, many wars have been fought over differences. To eliminate war, the world must find another way of resolving differences. That is where the citizenship skill of balance comes in.

Key Note Term

balance—the understanding that there is more than one side to every issue, and having the ability to come to agreement and resolve differences by using either compromising or harmonizing solutions

Balance is accepting there are at least two sides to every issue, each with some truth. There is not a wrong and a right viewpoint, even though one might appear better initially. All sides can have some merit. All viewpoints can have some errors as well.

Balance plays a win/win game where both sides benefit from the process. Winning and losing are for debates and football games. Thus, in some ways, practicing the skill of balance can be contrary to everything we have been taught.

The skill of practicing balance involves using either compromise or harmony to achieve an agreement that works. The two are very different. Harmony means combining the best qualities of all sides and coming up with an entirely different but better solution that meets all sides' needs. Sometimes this is called a win/win solution.

Compromise, on the other hand, is a solution in which each side gives a little to come to a common ground. This can also be win/win if each side does not give up too much.

Probably the best example of using balance in history was the development of the Constitution. Both harmony and compromise were used in the drafting of this document. Take look at each of these, respectively.

Two strong factions had differing opinions about the balance of power in our government. Some Founders wanted the states to hold the primary power of the nation; others wanted the majority of power to be held by a federal government.

Both sides had valid points. To harmonize the two factions, the Founders came up with a third solution that satisfied both sides of the argument—sovereign state governments supplemented by a federal government that was given great power but only in certain specific areas such as foreign affairs, defense, and interstate trade. The federal government also was given the power to resolve differences between states if the states alone could not resolve them. All other powers not specifically wielded by the federal government were reserved for the states.

This design was based on the dual-sovereignty theme of the Native American Iroquois Council of Governments. For hundreds of years before our nation was formed, the Iroquois used a form of government that combined five separate nations—Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida, and Cayuga into one overall League of Nations.

Each nation elected representatives called sachems. Sachems held meetings (called councils) to discuss issues that concerned the internal affairs of each nation. Periodically the sachems from all five nations would meet together in a Grand Council to discuss issues that affected all five nations such as war, peace, treaties, and new members to the Grand Council.

Benjamin Franklin became intimately familiar with the Iroquois government because of his job as a diplomat for Pennsylvania and as a scholar of Native American literature. He was able to persuade the Founders to copy the Iroquois system in many ways. The most important way was the design of state governments with an overall federal government.

The Founders were able to design a system of government that satisfied the needs of both sovereign states and a federal government—a win/win solution.

The debate between state or federal control of power continues in Congress to this day. Control of power was really challenged in the Civil War, but the design envisioned by the Iroquois and used by the Founders works because it uses balance as a key element.

Another agreement that was needed, as part of the Constitution, is known as The Great Compromise. This agreement obviously used compromise as a way to achieve balance. Large states wanted representation based on population, but small states were afraid the heavily-populated states would dominate. Therefore, both a Senate and House were formed in our Congress.

Both sides had to give up something—the heavily populated states had to relinquish their power in the Senate and the sparsely populated states had to relinquish their power in the House.

You are probably more familiar with the use of compromise as a way to achieve agreement, but do not rule out using harmony, where a whole new solution can be used that solves the problem for both sides.

One place to practice balance is when reading or hearing news reports. Political campaigns have shown how influential the news media can be. Before we make up our minds on an issue, though, we need to look at more than one news source to understand all sides. From this balanced knowledge, we are better able to see compromising or harmonizing solutions.

Conclusion

From the signing of the U.S. Constitution to present day, the seven citizenship skills have played a major part in shaping and developing our country. The Preamble set the groundwork for the ideals of this nation, and also created a guide to what good citizenship should be.

The next lesson looks at small group meetings. You will examine the purpose and process of small group meetings, from choosing a meeting leader to presenting the meeting agenda. You will also learn to identify the small group meeting roles.

Lesson Review

1. List the seven citizenship skills.
2. Choose two of the skills and explain how they can work together.
3. How do the seven citizenship skills relate to the Preamble of the Constitution?
4. Explain how self-improvement can make you a better citizen.