

In this lesson, students will learn the meaning of civics and how to exercise their civic responsibilities through community participation.

Supplies

- [“Participation” document](#)

Setup

- Ensure students have access to the primary sources listed on the “Participation” document, either through their own devices or projected on a screen for the students to see.

Objectives

- Students will understand the definition of civics.
- Students will learn about different ways to exercise their civic responsibilities.

Background

Elections are the most obvious way Americans participate in their government. However, fourth graders are not old enough to vote, so the importance of civics may be easy to overlook. Search the word “civics” online, and the results are related to history, government, and politics, but civics is much more than that. According to *Educating for American Democracy*, civics “encompasses the knowledge, values, skills and practices that facilitate living in a community with one another and governing ourselves.” Participating in and advocating for benefits to one’s community, state, or nation ensures a healthy democracy. Democracies are based on citizen participation, no matter the age of the individual. Even fourth graders can participate in their communities to make them stronger and better for all people.

Participating in a democracy can take several forms. People can volunteer, protest, send a letter to the editor, write to any elected official who represents them, testify in front of Congress, join an organization

that supports their community, educate others, give a speech, stand up for someone who is being bullied, or participate in a political campaign, among other actions.

Activity

1. This lesson can be used in conjunction with Sections 1 and 2 of Part 4 of the North Dakota Studies *Citizenship* textbook.
2. Ask the students if they know what the word civics means. Give them a few minutes to answer, guiding them as they work toward a correct answer.
3. Tell students that civics is related to the actions people take to help their community, state, or nation. It is important for everyone to know what civics is and to participate in their community, state, or nation for our government to thrive.
4. Tell students, “One way many adults exercise their civic responsibilities is by voting. As a fourth grader, you are not old enough to vote, so how might you participate in making your community, state, or nation better?”
5. Have students brainstorm a few ideas of their own or refer to Part 4, Section 2 of the North Dakota Studies *Citizenship* book that lists some “Responsibilities of Young Citizens.” Discuss the students’ ideas and the list.
6. Tell the students that they will be looking at photographs that demonstrate different ways people, even young people, can participate in their community.
7. Show each individual primary source, and have students match the picture to the type of participation.
8. Have the students identify the type of participation represented by each picture.
9. Close by asking the students to define civics and discuss how they could participate in democracy.

Extension

1. Challenge students to participate some way in their community, state, or nation during the next week and record it. This could take the form of a picture, note written by an adult, product they need to produce to complete the task, etc.
2. A [lesson plan on Kid Citizen](#) helps students understand participation through primary sources that complement this lesson. That lesson is aimed at grades K-2 but could potentially be adapted.

Reflection questions

1. What would the community or nation be like if no one participated in their community?
2. Can you think of ways you, your family, friends, and other people have participated in your community?