

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PACKET

Directions: As you read each document, highlight information that helps answer the question, “What does it mean to be a good citizen of our democracy?” For any information that you highlight, make notes in the margins explaining your reasoning.

DOCUMENT 1: RESPONSIBILITIES OF U.S. CITIZENS

As Americans, we have been bound together for more than 200 years by the democratic ideals and principles outlined in our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Perhaps most fundamental is the belief that democratic governments get their power from the consent of the governed—or, in other words, from the people. The government is trusted to use that power to protect the rights and freedoms of its citizens. We must take our responsibilities and rights as citizens seriously to ensure our democracy thrives.

What are the Responsibilities of a Citizen?

Understand how the government works. The structure of the U.S. government is outlined in the Constitution. The framers of the Constitution wanted to create a government with limited power. This would ensure the rights of the people are protected while at the same time giving the national government enough power to be effective. They used systems like popular sovereignty, federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances to accomplish this goal.

Participate in the democratic process. Registering and voting in local, state, and federal elections is the most important and direct way for citizens to use our power and voice to influence the decisions that impact our communities. Beyond voting, we should communicate with our elected representatives about issues that are important to us. Additionally, as citizens, we can run for elected office and serve the public by carrying out the duties of the government.

Be informed. U.S. citizens should learn about politics and current events that impact their local, state, and national communities. Citizens should seek out information about issues, policies, and candidates running for office before casting a vote in an election. To do this, citizens should have access to the news that they have critically evaluated for quality and credibility as well as engage in dialogue with others about important issues facing their communities.

Respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others. Though the United States is a nation of diverse backgrounds and cultures, our common civic values unite us as one nation. Tolerance through civility and respect for the beliefs and opinions of others are the foundations of a democratic society. They ensure the protection of liberty and freedom for future generations.

Participate in your local community. Being an active and engaged member of one’s local community is important to the success of representative democracy. Community engagement

through volunteerism and public service are ways individuals can actively contribute to making their community a better place.

Protest injustice. As citizens, it is our right and responsibility to express ourselves in speech, press, assembly, and petition to try and change the things we see as unjust. When something concerns you, it is important to educate yourself on the issue and seek out avenues for change. This includes holding elected officials accountable to the rights of the American people.

Obey laws. Laws are the rules made at the local, state, and federal levels by our elected governments. Community members are expected to follow these laws to maintain order and cooperation in a free society. All people living in the U.S. must follow laws established through local, state, and federal authorities. If citizens feel that certain laws are unjust, they have the responsibility to work towards changing those laws.

Pay taxes. Taxes pay for government services at the local, state, and federal levels. The collective commitment of contributing our tax dollars allows us to provide robust government services to the American people. Some of these services include educating our children in public schools, keeping our country safe and secure with a well-trained and prepared military, providing access to health care, and building and maintaining public infrastructure like roads and bridges. Paying taxes on time and in full ensures that these services continue for all Americans.

Serve on juries. When called upon, serving on a jury is an important service to the community. The Constitution guarantees that all persons accused of a crime have the right to a “speedy and public trial by an impartial jury.” Jury service gives U.S. citizens the opportunity to participate in the vital task of achieving just, fair results in matters that come before the court.

Support and defend the Constitution and the country. The preservation of our representative democracy and principles of the Constitution depends on the support of its citizens. It is essential that we are loyal to our system of government as described in the Constitution, rather than a particular leader or group of people with political power. As such, it is essential that we defend our democratic principles when they are being undermined or threatened.

In some cases, defending the Constitution requires military service. The Armed Forces of the United States—that is, the military—is currently an all-volunteer force. However, should the need arise in time of war, it is important that all citizens join and contribute where they are able. This may include active-duty military service or a noncombatant or civilian role.

Sources:

Packer, A. (2016 March). Creating informed citizens should be education's goal (opinion). Education Week.

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Kutz, K. (2020 September). *Obligations of citizenship* [video]. Khan Academy. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-government-and-civics/x231f0f4241b58f49:citizens-us-gov-civics/x231f0f4241b58f49:what-are-the-rights-and-responsibilities-of-citizenship/v/obligations-of-citizenship>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2017 May). *Rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens*. Newsela. https://newsela.com/read/us-citizens-rights-and-responsibilities/id/31099/?collection_id=2000000398&search_id=2c09b2db-1b57-4045-b472-c28208795ffb

DOCUMENT 2: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

January 10, 2017

I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved and they get engaged, and they come together to demand it. [...]

I still believe that. And it's not just my belief. It's the beating heart of our American idea—our bold experiment in self-government. It's the conviction that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It's the insistence that these rights, while self-evident, have never been self-executing; that We, the People, through the instrument of our democracy, can form a more perfect union. [...]

For [many] years, our nation's call to citizenship has given work and purpose to each new generation. It's what led patriots to choose republic over tyranny, pioneers to trek west, slaves to brave that makeshift railroad to freedom. It's what pulled immigrants and refugees across oceans and the Rio Grande. It's what pushed women to reach for the ballot. It's what powered workers to organize. It's why GIs gave their lives fighting for our country. And why men and women from Selma to Stonewall were prepared to give theirs, as well. [...]

The work of democracy has always been hard. It's always been contentious. Sometimes it's been bloody. For every two steps forward, it often feels we take one step back. But the long sweep of America has been defined by forward motion, a constant widening of our founding creed to embrace all and not just some. [...]

Understand, democracy does not require uniformity. Our founders argued. They quarreled. Eventually they compromised. They expected us to do the same. But they knew that democracy does require a basic sense of solidarity—the idea that for all our outward differences, we're all in this together; that we rise or fall as one. [...]

Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted. All of us, regardless of party, should be throwing ourselves into the task of rebuilding our democratic institutions. [...]

But remember, none of this happens on its own. All of this depends on our participation; on each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging.

Our Constitution is a remarkable, beautiful gift. But it's really just a piece of parchment. It has no power on its own. We, the people, give it power. We, the people, give it meaning. With our participation, and with the choices that we make, and the alliances that we forge. Whether or not we stand up for our freedoms. Whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law. That's up to us. America is no fragile thing. But the gains of our long journey to freedom are not assured. [...]

It falls to each of us to be those anxious, jealous guardians of our democracy; to embrace the joyous task we've been given to continually try to improve this great nation of ours. Because for all our outward differences, we, in fact, all share the same proud title, the most important office in a democracy: Citizen.

So, you see, that's what our democracy demands. It needs you. Not just when there's an election, not just when your own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime. [...] If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself. Show up. Dive in. Stay at it. [...]

Let me tell you, this generation coming up—unselfish, altruistic, creative, patriotic -- I've seen you in every corner of the country. [...] You are willing to carry this hard work of democracy forward. [...] I believe as a result the future is in good hands. [...]

I am asking you to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice; that creed reaffirmed by those who planted flags from foreign battlefields to the surface of the moon; a creed at the core of every American whose story is not yet written: Yes we can.

*Source: Obama, B. (2021 May). President Obama's farewell address [Speech transcript]. The White House.
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/360231> (Original work published January 10, 2017)*

COMPARING THE TEXTS

Directions: After reading and annotating both documents, choose **one** of the following questions to respond to. Use the space below to write your response. Your response should be at least four sentences.

1. How are these articles similar or related? Explain.
2. What specific lines and details of these texts echo each other or connect? Explain.
3. If the creators of these texts were to have a conversation, what is one important thing they might say to each other? Explain.
4. What questions do these texts raise for you? What reactions do you have to them, either individually or together? Explain.

*Adapted from: The Learning Network. (2018 January). Comparing two or more texts. The New York Times.
https://static01.nyt.com/images/blogs/learning/pdf/2013/13-1553_K12_CompareText_LearnNet_RP2.pdf*