

Name: Date:

Class: ECS

**Practicing Citizenship**

 ***Principles of Government***

 The government of the United States is based on the rules written down in the U.S. Constitution. The United States has a **representative government.** This means that citizens vote to elect, or choose, people who will serve in government. These people are supposed to act in the interests of the citizens who voted for them.

 The Constitution also limits the powers of the government. The United States has a **federal system**. The federal, or central, government has the most power. But it shares power with the state government. The Constitution also divides the federal government into three branches, or parts. Each branch has it’s own set of powers. This idea is called **separation of powers.**

 What powers does each branch have? The **legislative branch** makes laws. The U.S. Congress is the legislative branch. It is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The **executive branch** carries out the laws. The president is the leader of the executive branch. The **judicial branch** reviews and interprets the laws. The Supreme Court is the leading court of the judicial branch.

 The Constitution also creates a system of **checks and balances**. This means that each branch can check, or limit, the power of another branch. For example, the president can veto, or block, a law proposed by Congress. However, Congress can overturn a veto with enough votes. The system of checks and balances keeps any one part of government from becoming too powerful.

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***What is Citizenship?***

 American citizens have rights, duties, and responsibilities. Rights are freedoms protected by law. All Americans have the right to seek, or look for, life, liberty, and happiness. All Americans may speak their minds freely. They can also write what they think. Together these rights are called freedom of expression. Americans have the right to go to meetings and other gatherings that are peaceful. If they have a problem, they can write to government officials and ask them to help. This is called the right to petition. The Constitution also protects freedom of religion. This means that people can worship as they choose. If someone is accused of a serious crime, they have a right to a trial by jury.

A jury is a group of people who listen to both sides in a court case. Jury members are guided by a judge. They decide if the accused person is guilty or innocent of the crime.

Citizens also have the right to vote. This allows them to choose their leaders. Citizens are free to serve in public office. These and other rights are discussed in the Bill of Rights and other amendments to the Constitution.

The Constitution also says that citizens have some duties. These are things that all citizens must do. All citizens must obey the law and pay taxes. This applies to federal, state, and local laws and taxes. Citizens must serve on a jury if asked. They must also be ready to defend the United States and the Constitution.

Responsibilities are actions that are not required by law. They are still very important. Carrying out these acts helps protect the freedoms that Americans enjoy. Being responsible also helps local communities. Citizens should stay informed about important issues. Issues are topics that affect many people, such as crime or education. Learning about issues helps citizens make wise choices when they vote. In addition to being a right, voting is a key responsibility of citizenship. Citizens should vote and vote with care. If they do not, they have less chance of being represented in government.

Citizens should also respect the rights and views of other people. The United States welcomes people of many different backgrounds. All these people share the same freedoms. Before you deny a right to someone else, think about how you would feel if someone tried to take away your rights.

Finally, citizens should take part in their local community. By working with each other, we help make our neighborhoods and towns better places to live. There are different ways to keep our communities strong. We can volunteer our time. We can join neighborhood groups, and we can serve in public office.

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***Being a Global Citizen***

Today the world faces many problems. Often these problems are too big for any one country to handle alone. Pollution is one example. It can spread from one country to another. Trade is a world issue. Most countries trade with at least one other country. Some rely on trade to help their economies, so the laws about trade are important to many countries.

 Another global issue is human rights. Around the world, many people do not have the same rights as Americans. Improving this situation is a goal of the United States and the United Nations. The United Nations is an international organization that promotes peace, human rights, and cooperation between the countries of the world.

 Being a global citizen means learning about these and other issues that affect the world as a whole. It also means understanding better how people live in other countries. A key goal of global citizenship is working together with others. One way to do that is to respect the views of others.

 Being a global citizen does not mean giving up your duties and responsibilities as a U.S. citizen. It means thinking about how you can make the world a better place by your actions.

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