

The Five Principles of Citizenship

While the definition of “citizenship” is certainly evolving, especially given the number of online and offline communities we all belong to today, the central principles of “good citizenship” remain evergreen. Learning these principles (definitions adapted from [Education World](#)) gives students a framework for digital citizenship. This framework comes in handy as they discover that while most offline communities have rules, rights, and responsibilities that have evolved over time, the same does not always hold true for online communities which are newer. Thus, these five principles can help guide students towards good citizenship, both online and off.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Understand what it means to be a member, or citizen, of a community.
- Consider all the communities they are members of.
- Think of ways community members demonstrate five principles of citizenship.



INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Ask students how they got to school this morning. Ask: *Did you ride a bike? Travel in a car?* Ask what they did when they arrived a stop sign or traffic light. Ask: *Did you stop, slow down, proceed? How did you know what to do?* If they traveled in a car, ask: *Who was driving? What gave your driver the authority to drive? If there was a line of cars when you arrived at school, did your driver cut to the front of the line? Why or why not?* Guide students towards the understanding that citizens are guided by rules, rights, and responsibilities that are generally understood and agreed to by all community members.

THE LESSON

1. Tell students that we all belong to, or are “citizens” of many different groups or “communities” that are guided by rules or principles. Explain and have them record (in their books) the following definitions:

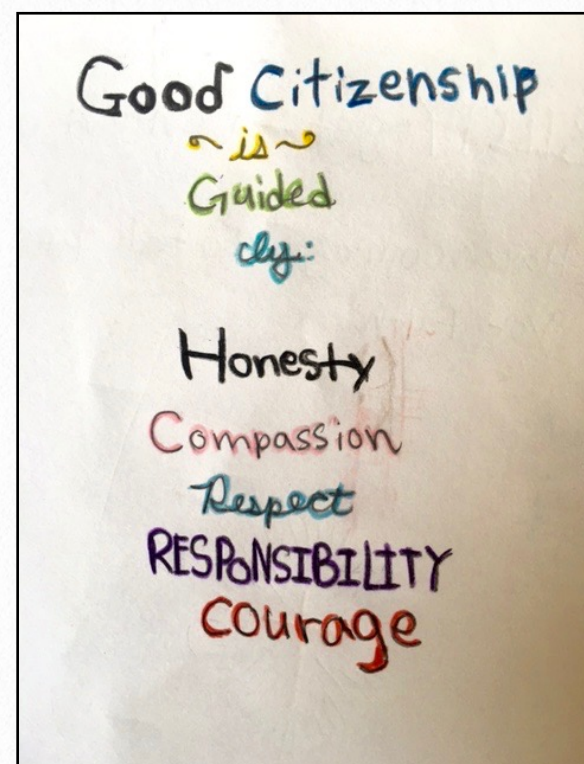
CITIZEN: A member of a community.

COMMUNITY: A group of people sharing a space or having characteristics in common.

THE LESSON, continued

2. Explain that the smallest community they belong to is probably their family. Ask students to think of some of the other communities they belong to, such as their class, their school, a sports team, choral group, church, etc. Have students take a moment to list (in their books) all the communities they are “citizens” of.
3. After students have listed the communities they belong to, explain that being a “good citizen” is guided by five important principles or themes. Take a few minutes to describe and discuss each one:

- **Honesty** is being truthful and fair. A good citizen must be honest with others, and with himself or herself.
- **Compassion** is the emotion of caring for people and for other living things. Compassion gives a citizen an emotional bond with his or her world.
- **Respect** is showing regard or consideration for others. Sometimes respect is even directed toward inanimate things or ideas. A good citizen should have respect for laws.
- **Responsibility** is about being answerable and accountable. For example, one of the main responsibilities of a student is to learn. They must educate themselves so that they can achieve their full potential.
- **Courage** is doing the right thing even when its unpopular, difficult, or dangerous. Many people throughout history—such as Martin Luther King Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Mahatma Gandhi—have demonstrated great courage.



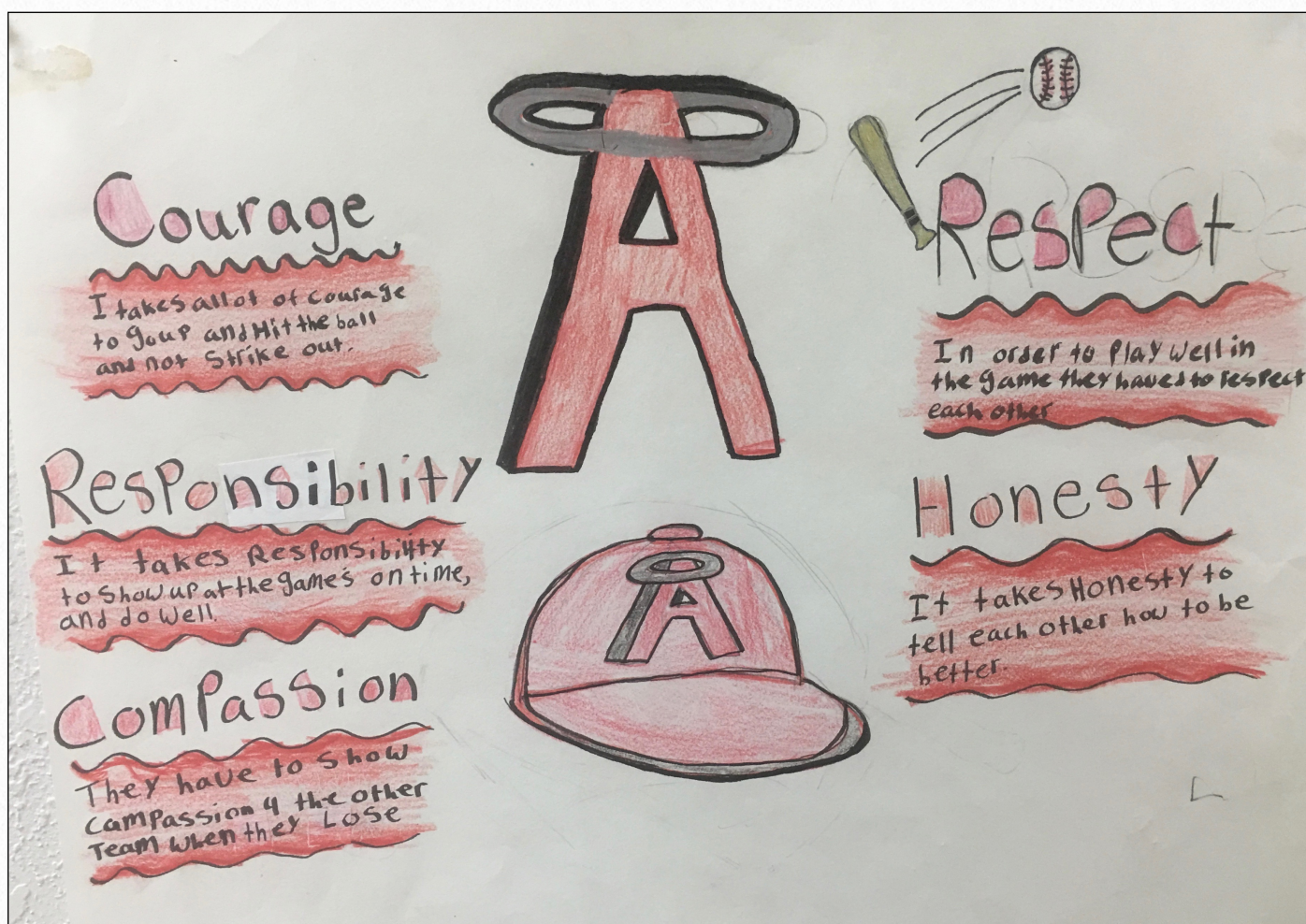
4. **Activity:** Once you have discussed these principles, divide your class into groups of 3-4 students. Assign **one** offline community to each group for them to discuss, such as: *their class, a sports team, a club, their church, their immediate family, their extended family, their state, their county, their country* (or let them choose one community from the lists they made in step 3). Challenge students to think of at least **one** example of how their community might demonstrate *each* of the five principles. Every group should choose a scribe to write down what they discuss. If your students need help getting started, share the following example.

THE LESSON, continued

5. In the following example, students consider how members of a baseball team might demonstrate the five principles:

- **Honesty:** It takes honesty to tell each other how to play better.
- **Compassion:** It's important to show compassion to the other team if they lose.
- **Respect:** Shaking hands with opponents after a game shows respect.
- **Responsibility:** It takes responsibility to show up to games on time and do well.
- **Courage:** It takes a lot of courage to go up and hit the ball.

6. Next, have groups work together to create small posters illustrating the examples they came up (example below). Ask groups to share their work with the entire class.



Actual Student Work

GOAL

Students begin to understand that “good citizenship,” both online and off, is guided by simple principles.

CITIZEN:

A member of a community.

COMMUNITY:

**A group of people sharing a space
or having characteristics in common.**

- **HONESTY** is being truthful and fair. A good citizen must be honest with others, and with himself or herself.
- **COMPASSION** is the emotion of caring for people and for other living things. Compassion gives a citizen an emotional bond with his or her world.
- **RESPECT** is showing regard or consideration for others. Sometimes respect is even directed toward inanimate things or ideas. A good citizen should have respect for laws.
- **RESPONSIBILITY** is about being answerable and accountable. For example, one of the main responsibilities of a student is to learn. They must educate themselves so that they can achieve their full potential.
- **COURAGE** is doing the right thing even when its unpopular, difficult, or dangerous. Many people throughout history—such as Martin Luther King Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Mahatma Gandhi—have demonstrated great courage.

How To Be a Good Citizen Online



Now that students understand the guiding principles of “good citizenship” offline, it’s time to help them apply these principles to online communities they might belong to, or will belong to in the future. Many online communities lack guidelines or have rules that are unclear (or buried in their “Terms of Use”), that’s why it’s important to help students understand how to be a good citizen even in these digital spaces!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Reflect on the principles of good citizenship.
- Think about online communities they belong to, or will belong to.
- Consider how to apply the principles of good citizenship to online communities

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Ask your students if they have ever played soccer. Chances are, most of them will have played this game at one time or another, or at least have a general understanding of how the game is played. Have students explain the rules of soccer to you. Ask: *Would you enjoy playing this game if there were no rules? What if no one kept score? What if the field had no boundary lines? How would you like it if players could foul whenever they felt like it, without any consequences?* Explain that without rules or guidelines, games like soccer are no fun to play. Challenge your students to think about how the same might be true online. Without guidelines, rules, or principles, playing or engaging with others online can get out of control and end up being no fun too.

THE LESSON

1. Ask students to recall some of the **offline** communities they mentioned belonging to in your previous lesson. Guide them as they reflect upon how they exhibited the principles of good citizenship within those communities. Next, ask students to list some of the **online** communities people belong to today (i.e., multiplayer games, online classes, group chats, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, even Google Classroom!). Explain that they are about to explore how the same principles that guide us offline, help us when we are online too.

THE LESSON, continued

2. Divide your class into five equally-sized groups. Assign **one** of the five principles to each group.
3. Explain that **an online community is any digital space where members interact and communicate with one another**. Ask each group to think of an online community they might belong to now or in the future (i.e., Fortnite, YouTube, Google Classroom, Instagram, Snapchat). It doesn't matter if your students actually belong to these online communities or not.
4. Give each group a large piece of paper and have them write their principle at the top with the name of the online community they chose below it. Challenge students to think about how they might exhibit their principle within that online community. Ask them to write their example(s) down, like this:



5. Have each group select a spokesperson. Each spokesperson should present their group's work to the class. Facilitate a class discussion.
6. Next, ask groups to turn their papers over. Their task is to think of **a possible consequence of NOT demonstrating that principle** within the online community they chose. For example, tell students that a possible consequence of not showing compassion on YouTube might be that a recipient of negative comments might feel hurt or depressed. A kind post or comment might make them feel better. Additionally, seeing a positive comment sometimes encourages others to post positive comments too, just as negative or offensive comments often encourage the same. By showing compassion or kindness in digital spaces, you might inspire others to do so too.

THE LESSON, continued

7. Have each group share their possible consequences with the class.
8. Finish by explaining to students that participation in any online community is a huge responsibility. These principles can help guide a community member's online actions.

GOAL

To help students take responsibility for their behavior by exhibiting the principles of good citizenship whenever they engage with others, online or off.