

Who Are We?

Americans need to study up on the United States.



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Are you a master at math? A rock star at reading? What about **civics**? If you are like millions of Americans, your government know-how might be more of a “know-little.”

Civics is the study of the rights and duties of citizens. A good citizen needs to know at least basic information about the nation, such as how the government is run. He or she also needs to know about the country’s history and the problems and challenges facing the nation today.

However, recent studies have found that a lot of Americans don’t know enough about the United States. In one study, only one in three Americans could name the three branches of government. In another, less than 4 percent of teens in Arizona could pass a **citizenship test**. That is a test people from other countries need to pass to become U.S. citizens.

Those findings could make Uncle Sam want to move to Canada! After all, if citizens don’t know about their country, they can’t help run it, says former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. “We are [very lucky] to have a stable ... government,” she told *WR News*. “But ... it is the citizens of our nation who must preserve our system of government, and we cannot forget that.”

Citizens Rule!

When the country’s founders wrote the Constitution in 1787, they did something completely unheard of—they gave the power to the people! They thought U.S. citizens should have a say in how the nation is run.

One of the most important responsibilities Americans have is voting. U.S. citizens elect the people who run the country, from city officials to the U.S. president. Those elected officials make and **enforce**, or put into effect, laws that affect the whole country.

That's why it's so important that people get clued in on civics, says Syd Golston. She is the president of the National Council for the Social Studies. "People who vote need to be **informed** [or educated] because they're really making the decisions," Golston told *WR News*.

Civics in Motion



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Uncle Sam wants you to
learn more about civics!

Some U.S. education experts say schools spend less time teaching civics now than they did in the past. "It used to be a subject that was taught ... so many minutes a day," says Margaret Branson. She is the associate director of the Center for Civic Education. "The teaching of civics and government has just dropped off dramatically."

O'Connor is trying to change that. She has spoken out in TV interviews, stressing the value of learning about the United States. She also works with Our Courts, a Web site that teaches children about civics.

Other star citizens are speaking out on Uncle Sam's behalf. Actor Richard Dreyfuss is crafting a national plan for civics education. Former Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter is stepping up civics talk in schools in his home state of New Hampshire.

Use the News

But studying in school isn't the only way to become a civics know-it-all, Golston points out. "Read a newspaper, [and] watch the news with your parents," she suggests. And of course, don't forget to read *WR News*!

Pop Quiz!

Are you a civics smartypants? Time to find out!



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(1) What was the purpose of the Declaration of Independence?



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(2) Name one of Abraham Lincoln's accomplishments.



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(3) What two groups make up the U.S. Congress?



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(4) In which state is the Statue of Liberty?



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(5) What did Susan B. Anthony fight for?

(6) In which month do we vote for president?



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(7) Name one country that the United States fought in World War II.



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(8) What is Martin Luther King Jr. famous for?

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, what is civics?

- A Civics is reading newspapers and learning about current events.
- B Civics is studying to pass a citizenship test.
- C Civics is the study of rights and duties of citizens.
- D Civics is the voting process Americans must follow.

2. This passage discusses the problem that most Americans do not have a lot of civics knowledge. What is one solution people have proposed to solve this problem?

- A ignore civics in schools
- B make everyone visit museums
- C increase civics education in schools
- D make everyone take a citizenship test

3. Based on the passage, it is likely that Sandra Day O'Connor

- A thinks civics is an important part of education for students
- B thinks students do not need to know about civics
- C thinks that the U.S. should change how people are elected
- D thinks that kids should watch more TV and spend more time on the internet

4. Read the following sentences: "It used to be a subject that was taught ... so many minutes a day. The teaching of civics and government has just dropped off dramatically."

As used in the passage, **dramatically** means

- A the same
- B a lot
- C a little
- D colorfully

5. This passage is mostly about

- A what Sandra Day O'Connor thinks about American civics
- B some solutions to the lack of civics knowledge in America
- C some solutions to the election process in America
- D how much time is spent on civics in American classrooms

6. What are some ways the passage recommends for learning more about civics?

7. Based on the passage, what power did the Constitution give to the American people?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

American citizens must have a civics education, _____ they need to be informed in order to make important decisions when voting.

- A after
- B but
- C because
- D though

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

A few years ago, Sandra Day O'Connor started working with a web site called *Our Courts* because she wants to teach children about civics.

Who? Sandra Day O'Connor

(did) What? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

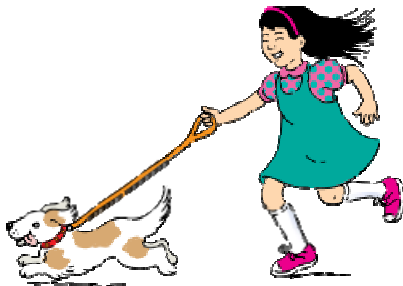
Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: **duties** (du.ties): things you have to do, or responsibilities.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word **duties**.

1. American citizens have duties, which include the responsibility of voting for the president.
2. The duties of her job require her to work with many different kinds of people.
3. When I was pet sitting for my aunt’s cat, making sure that the cat’s water bowl was full was one of my duties.
4. Policemen have many duties, but their main responsibility is making sure people are safe and protected.
5. I complete all my duties because my parents won’t let me watch TV until I’ve finished all of the tasks I’m responsible for.

10b. Which image represents a duty?



11. What is an example of a classroom duty a teacher may give a student? Why?
