



CITIZENSHIP

Lesson Plan for Grades 7-12

Lesson Plan: Citizenship

Grade Levels: 4th – 12th Grade

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Overview: This lesson helps students explore the meaning of citizenship in the United States. Students will learn the difference between the rights of citizens and the rights of all residents, the responsibilities that come with citizenship, and how people can become citizens through the naturalization process. Using a historical timeline, students will trace how the idea of citizenship has changed from the founding of the United States to the present.

The lesson connects to the work of Robert H. Jackson, Supreme Court Justice and Chief U.S. Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials, who often emphasized the importance of citizenship in a democracy. Jackson believed that being a citizen carried not only privileges but also serious responsibilities, including defending democratic values, respecting the law, and ensuring justice for all. His life and career show how active citizenship helps sustain democracy at home and abroad.

Learning Goals

- Define citizenship and identify ways to become a U.S. citizen
- Describe loyalty and treason
- List the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens and U.S. residents
- Trace the progress of citizenship and voting rights over time for various groups

Learning Standards

- New York State
 - Social Studies: 1.2, 1.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4
 - ELA Literacy in History/Social Studies: RH2, RH3, RH4, RH5
- Pennsylvania
 - History: 8.1.3, 8.1.6, 8.1.9, 8.1.12, 8.3.3, 8.3.6, 8.3.9, 8.3.12,
 - Civics and Government: 5.1.3, 5.1.6, 5.1.9, 5.1.12, 5.2.3, 5.2.6, 5.2.9, 5.2.12
 - Reading in History and Social Studies: 8.5.6-8B, 8.5.6-8C, 8.5.6-8D, 8.5.6-8E, 8.5.9-10B, 8.5.9-10C, 8.5.9-10D, 8.5.9-10E, 8.5.11-12B, 8.5.11-12C, 8.5.11-12D, 8.5.11-12E

Materials Needed

- For Students:
 - Graphic Organizer handouts



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- The Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America handouts
- Worksheet
- Teacher Resource: Definitions
- Teacher Resource: Rights and Responsibilities
- Teacher Resource: Brief History of Citizenship
- Teacher Resource: filled in graphic organizer
- Teacher Resource: filled in worksheet

Lesson Flow

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
 - a. Warm-Up Question: What does it mean to be a U.S. citizen? What do citizens do? Are there expectations of citizens? (write answers on the board)
 - b. Hand out graphic organizer
 - i. Go over the definition of Citizenship and Naturalization (see Teacher Resource)
2. The Oath of Allegiance (10 minutes)
 - a. Break students into small groups to read and analyze The Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America
 - i. Ask them to compare their answers from the introduction questions with what is said in the oath
 - ii. You could ask students to rewrite the oath in their own words to ensure understanding
 - b. Bring group back together and discuss
 - i. What did you find surprising in the oath?
 - ii. Do you think citizens born in the United States follow this oath?
 - iii. What part of the oath might be the hardest to keep? Why?
3. Rights and Responsibilities of a Citizen (10 minutes)
 - a. Remind students to fill in their graphic organizer: Go over rights and responsibilities (see Teacher Resource)
 - b. Discuss:
 - i. Why do you think it is important for citizens to know their rights and responsibilities?
 - ii. Which responsibility do you think is most important? Why?
4. History of Citizenship (10 minutes)
 - a. Remind students to fill in their graphic organizer: Go over brief history of citizenship (see Teacher Resource)
 - b. Discuss:
 - i. Who is still fighting for full citizenship rights today?



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- ii. Which amendment, law, or court case do you think made the biggest difference for expanding United States citizenship? Why?
5. Wrap-Up/Homework (5 minutes)
 - a. Give students worksheet

Assessment/Evaluation

- Participation in class discussions
- Completed graphic organizer for notes
- Completed worksheet



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Teacher Resource: Definitions

Citizenship: Membership in a country with full rights and responsibilities under that country's laws.

- By Birth: 14th Amendment → Anyone born in the U.S. or to U.S. citizen parents (with some exceptions) is a citizen at birth.
- By Naturalization: Requires residency (usually 5 years), English proficiency, civics test, interview, and the Oath of Allegiance.

Naturalization: The process through which non-citizens can become citizens.

- Step 1: Meet Eligibility Requirements
 - o Be at least 18 years old.
 - o Be a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) for at least 5 years (or 3 years if married to a U.S. citizen).
 - o Live in the U.S. for most of that time and show "good moral character" (no serious crimes).
 - o Exceptions apply for military service, refugees, and children of citizens.
 - Military Service
 - Lawful permanent residents who serve honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces during peacetime may apply for naturalization after 3 years (instead of 5).
 - During periods of hostilities (e.g., post-9/11), non-citizens who serve honorably may apply for expedited naturalization, even without meeting the usual residency requirement.
 - Service members can often complete the process abroad or while deployed.
 - Children of U.S. Citizens
 - Born Abroad: If at least one parent is a U.S. citizen (and certain residency requirements are met), the child is automatically a U.S. citizen at birth.
 - Adopted Children: Foreign-born adopted children of U.S. citizens can often automatically acquire citizenship if the adoption is finalized and they reside with their U.S. citizen parent(s).
 - Refugees and Asylees
 - Refugees and asylees may apply for lawful permanent residency (a "green card") one year after being admitted.
 - They can then apply for naturalization after 5 years of permanent residency (the same as other immigrants).



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- Step 2: Apply
 - o Complete Form N-400 ([Application for Naturalization](#)).
 - o Pay the required fee (waived in special cases sometimes).
- Step 3: Background Check
 - o Provide biometrics (fingerprints, photo, signature).
 - o The FBI will run an international background check to confirm eligibility.
- Step 4: Interview and Test
 - o Meet with a United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer.
 - Answer questions about your background and application.
 - o Take the naturalization test, which includes:
 - English test (reading, writing, and speaking in basic English)
 - [Civics test](#) (knowledge of United States history, government, and the Constitution).
- Step 5: Receive Application Decision
 - o The application is approved, denied, or continued (more information is needed for a decision).
- Step 6: Oath of Allegiance Ceremony
 - o Once approved, the final step is taking the Oath of Allegiance to the United States at a public ceremony.
 - o Once the oath is administered, the applicant is officially a United States Citizen.

Loyalty: Faithfulness or allegiance to one's country.

- Expressed in pledges, oaths, and actions (such as obeying laws, voting, military service).
 - o Examples: Oath of Allegiance by naturalized citizens and Pledge of Allegiance by all citizens

Treason: Betraying your country by attempting to overthrow the government or aiding enemies.

- The only crime defined in the U.S. Constitution (Article III, Section 3). Punishable by severe penalties, up to death.

Patriotism: Love for one's country, often expressed through traditions, holidays, symbols, and service. The emotions we feel when hearing The Star Spangled Banner, or the way we celebrate certain holidays like Independence Day, President's Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Day, Memorial Day, or Veterans Day can all show our patriotism.



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Teacher Resource: Rights and Responsibilities:

Rights for All U.S. Residents	Rights for U.S. Citizens Only	Responsibilities of All Residents	Responsibilities of Citizens
Freedom of speech, religion, press	Vote in federal elections	Obey the laws	Vote in elections
Freedom to assemble peacefully	Run for federal office	Pay taxes	Serve on juries
Freedom to petition the government	Apply for federal jobs requiring citizenship	Respect the rights of others	Register for Selective Service (males 18-26)
Protection from unreasonable searches	Obtain a U.S. passport	Serve in the community	Show loyalty to the U.S. (Pledge/Oath)
Right to due process & equal protection	Serve on juries	—	—



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Teacher Resource: Brief History of Citizenship

18th Century

- 1776: Citizenship tied to white, property-owning males.
- 1791: Property requirements removed; still only white males can vote.
- 1795: Naturalization Act allows “free white persons” to become citizens after 5 years.

19th Century

- 1848: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo grants U.S. citizenship to ~80,000 Mexican residents of the Southwest.
- 1857: *Dred Scott v. Sandford* — Supreme Court rules African Americans cannot be citizens.
- 1868: 14th Amendment overturns *Dred Scott*; establishes birthright citizenship.
- 1870: Naturalization extends to “white persons and persons of African descent.” 15th Amendment gives African American men the vote.

20th Century

- 1920: 19th Amendment grants women the right to vote.
- 1924: Indian Citizenship Act grants citizenship to all Native Americans.
- 1940s: Laws banning Asian immigrants from citizenship are overturned.
- 1952: Immigration and Nationality Act removes race and gender barriers to naturalization.
- 1965: Voting Rights Act ends discriminatory voting practices such as poll taxes and literacy tests.
- 1971: 26th Amendment lowers voting age to 18.

21st Century

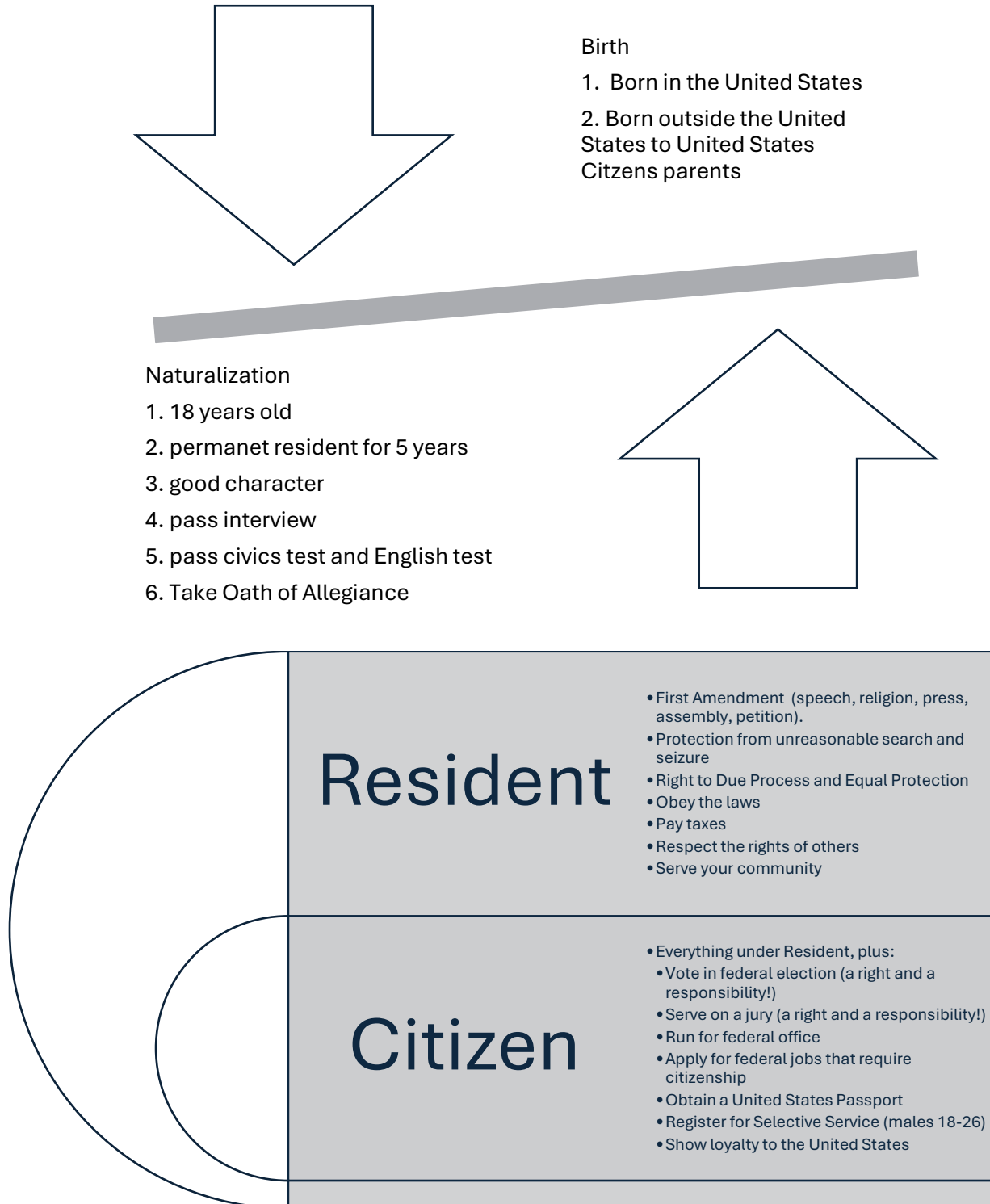
- 2001: USA PATRIOT Act increases national security measures, affecting immigration and naturalization processes.
- 2010s: Ongoing debates about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and the status of “Dreamers.”
- 2013: *Shelby County v. Holder* weakens the Voting Rights Act by removing the federal preclearance requirements for some states’ voting laws.
- 2020s: Ongoing discussions about voting rights, election access, and immigration reform.
- 2025: Ongoing legal and political challenges to birthright citizenship as protected by the 14th Amendment.



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Teacher Resource: Completed Graphic Organizer

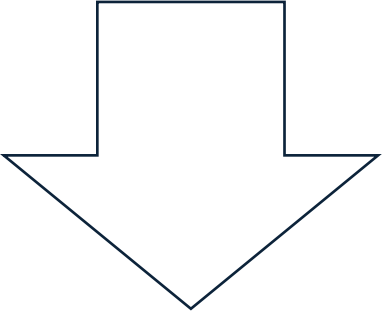




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Student Handout: Blank Graphic Organizer

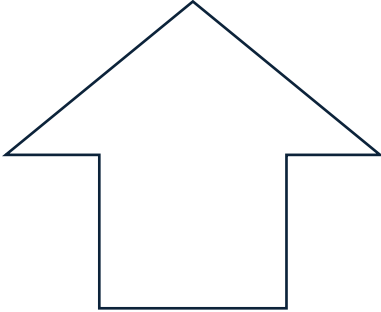


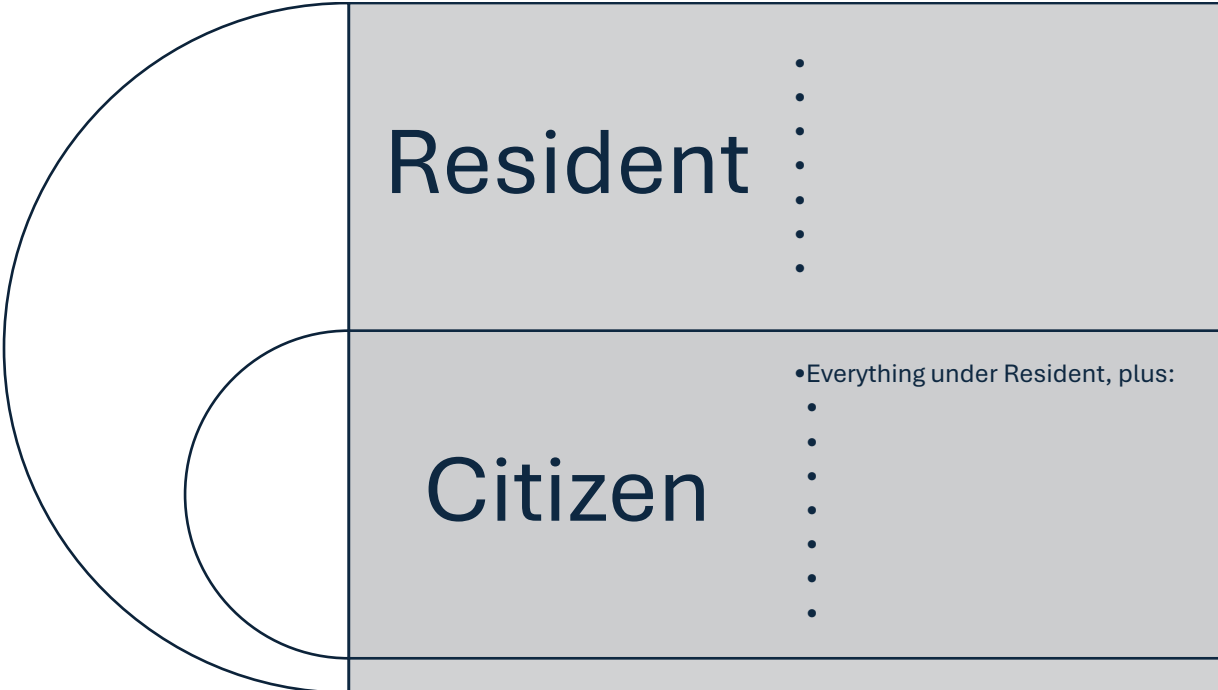
Birth

- 1.
- 2.

Naturalization

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.







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Teacher Resource: Completed Worksheet

Citizenship Check-Up: Decide whether each person is already a citizen, eligible for naturalization, or if they need to wait to apply.

1

BULAN

I was born in the Phillippines. I moved to the United States six years ago when I was 22 years old to study. I got a job and stayed here. I want to take my Citizenship Test soon!



Eligible

2

JESSICA

I am 17 years old and just finished an exchange student program in France! I loved living in Paris but I am glad to be home. I was born here in Wyoming.



Citizen



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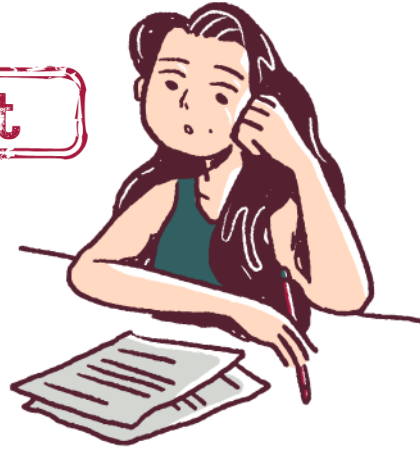
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3

ANASTASIA

My parents are both still living in Belarus, but I moved to the United States for work three years ago. I might be 34 years-old but I still miss my parents a lot. It would be easier to visit them if I had my United States Passport. I want to apply for citizenship.

Wait



4

TYLER

I was born while my mom was stationed in Germany. I spent the first 10 years of my childhood there, but then we came back to the United States and I finished high school and started college in my parents' hometown of Chicago.



Citizen

5

YOLANDA

I fled from my home in the middle of the night and was granted refugee status. The United States took me in 8 years ago and I have worked hard to learn English and adjust to living in a new country.

Eligible

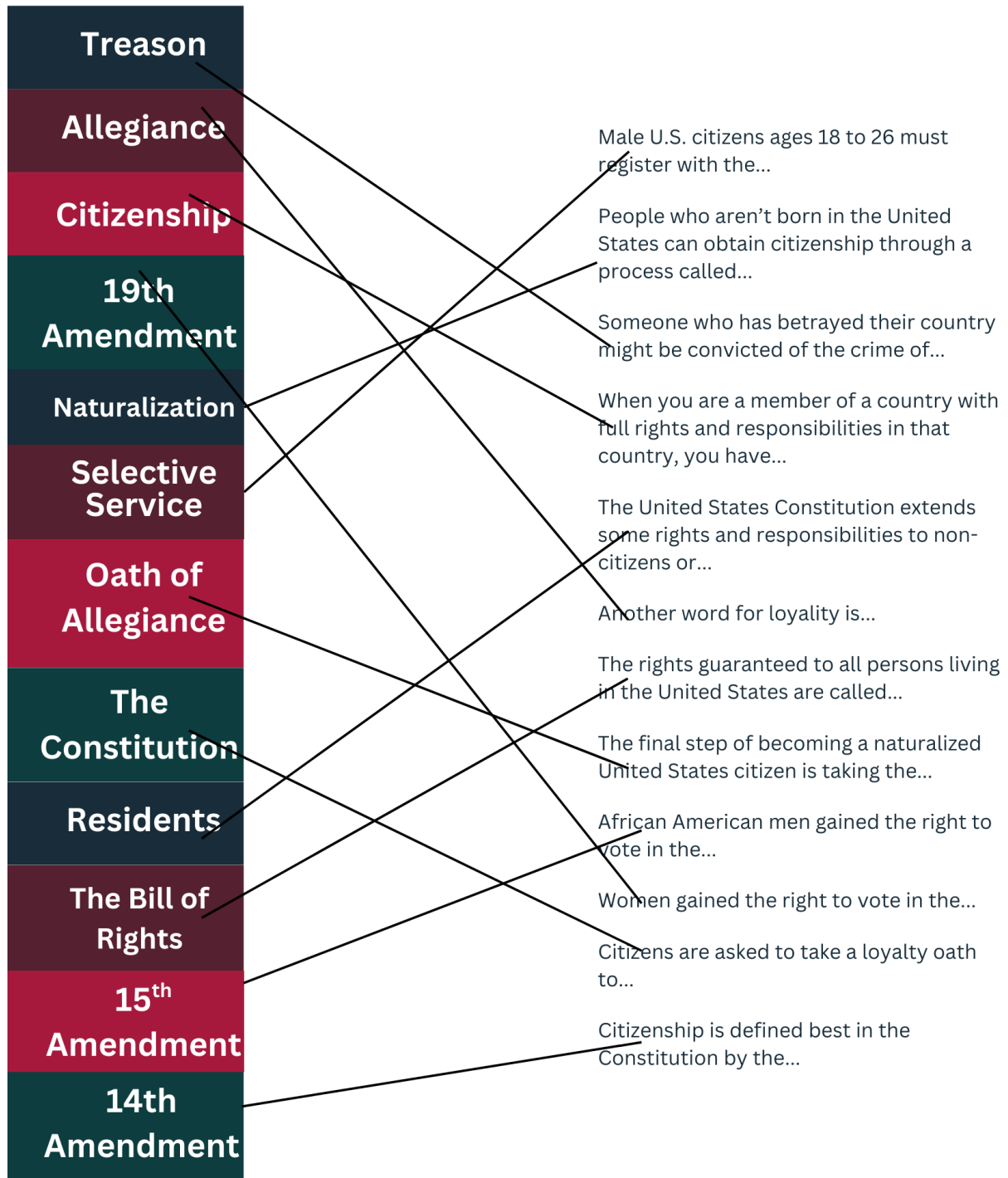




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Citizenship Matching





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Student Handout: Blank Worksheet

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Citizenship Matching

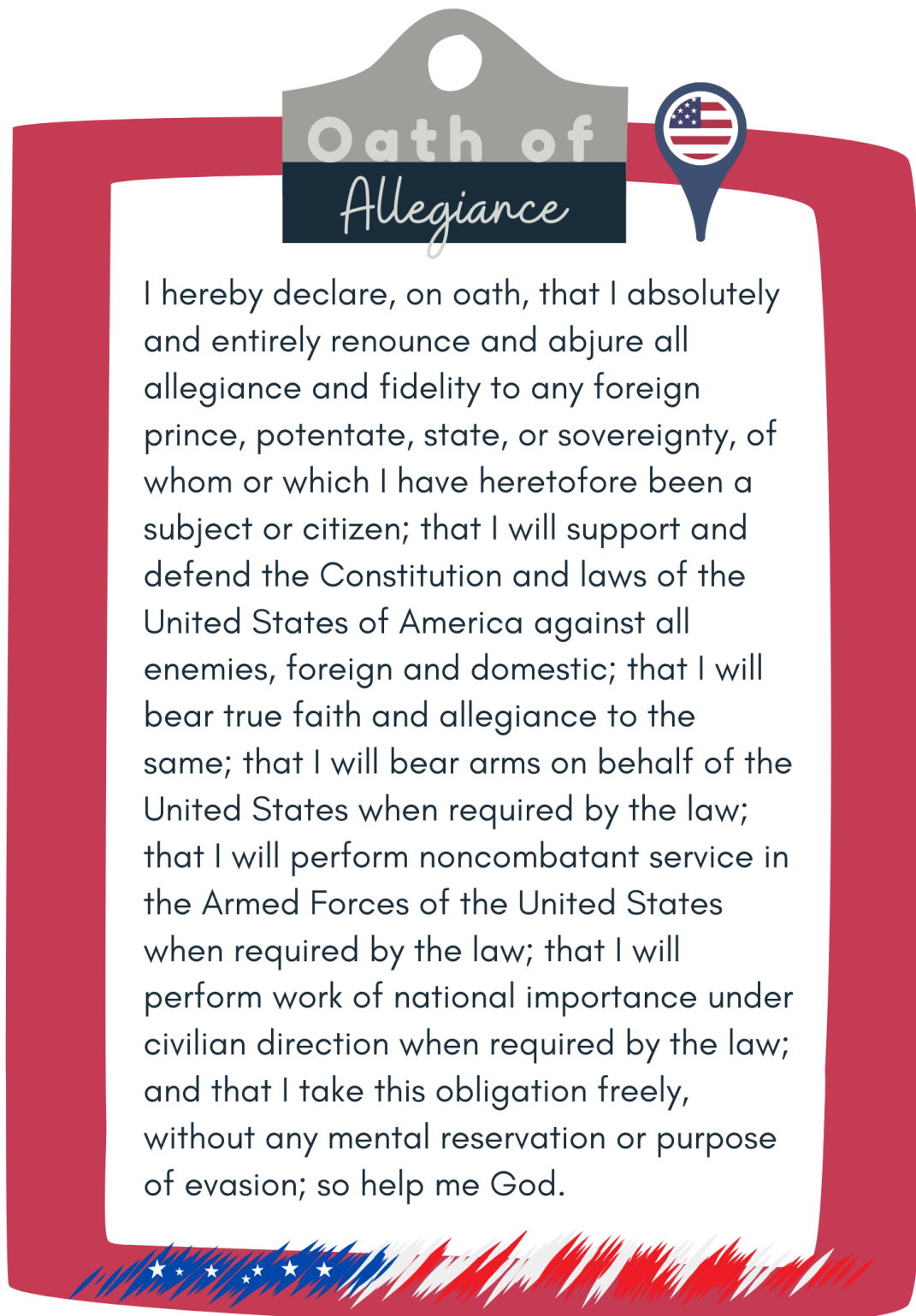
Treason	
Allegiance	Male U.S. citizens ages 18 to 26 must register with the...
Citizenship	People who aren't born in the United States can obtain citizenship through a process called...
19th Amendment	Someone who has betrayed their country might be convicted of the crime of...
Naturalization	When you are a member of a country with full rights and responsibilities in that country, you have...
Selective Service	The United States Constitution extends some rights and responsibilities to non-citizens or...
Oath of Allegiance	Another word for loyalty is...
The Constitution	The rights guaranteed to all persons living in the United States are called...
Residents	The final step of becoming a naturalized United States citizen is taking the...
The Bill of Rights	African American men gained the right to vote in the...
15th Amendment	Women gained the right to vote in the...
14th Amendment	Citizens are asked to take a loyalty oath to...
	Citizenship is defined best in the Constitution by the...



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Student Resource: The Oath of Allegiance to the United States



I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.