

# Why should individuals participate in the civic life of their communities?

**Creator:** The New Jersey Center for Civic Education, Rutgers University

**Grade Level:** 6-8

## **NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies**

6.3.8.CivicsPD.3: Construct a claim as to why it is important for democracy that individuals are informed by facts, aware of diverse viewpoints, and willing to take action on public issues.

**Anticipatory Lesson:** Share the following with your class: Athenian statesman Pericles said: “We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all”.

What does he mean by this statement? Individuals do not live alone but rather are part of a society and part of a government. As part of a society and part of a government, each person should become knowledgeable about their society and their government and participate.

Ask students: What are the benefits to individuals of participating in the civic life of our community/country? List their responses.

Conclude that individuals benefit by:

- Acquiring skills, such as speaking and debating in public, organizing groups and writing letters
- Becoming more self-confident
- Learning how to affect decisions
- Building a reputations as an important member of the community
- Making new friends
- Developing important contacts

Ask students: What are the benefits to society when individuals participate in the civic life of our country?

- In a multiethnic, multi-religious country based on the shared secular ideas of liberty and justice rather than the “blood and soil” nationalism of European countries, a common understanding and appreciation of these fundamental American values was seen as critical.
- Individual participation in the civic life of a democracy is critical for national cohesiveness. The results of elections are not enough.

Ask students and discuss: What might happen if citizens do not participate in democratic government at the local, state, or federal levels?

Conclude that:

- We won't have very good governments.
- We won't be able to solve important problems.

Ask students and discuss: What can individuals do to help ensure that the American experiment with democracy continues?

Watch one or both of the following short videos about what students in the U.S. and around the globe have done to improve their communities:

- *The New York Times*: [The Power to Change the World](#)
- Center for Civic Education: [Project Citizen International Documentary "The World We Want"](#)

Conclude that individuals can help ensure that the American experiment with democracy continues by:

- Voting
- Holding elected representatives accountable
- Bringing ideas to governmental officials
- Running for office
- Having civil discourses about current events
- Peacefully protesting when there is an unfair law or process that needs to be brought to the attention of the public and addressed and public officials are ignoring it