

## Character Trait for August, 2014 – Citizenship

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The Character Trait for the month of August, 2014 in the City of Opelika is “Citizenship”. The Character Council defines the word as “carrying out the duties and responsibilities of one’s community, city and country.” While that is certainly a true statement, this author would suggest that being a good citizen is *also* about being an informed, responsible, and caring participant in not only your community, but also your school, your church (if you are a member of one) and any other organization you are a part of, and doing your share to make it a better place for everyone. As Albert Einstein once said, “The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive.”

The hallmark of being a good citizen encompasses five other character traits which, when combined with a sense of Citizenship, creates a person of tremendous distinction, and the type of citizen we should all strive to be. What are those character traits which go into making one an outstanding citizen?

1. *Trustworthiness* – doing what you say you will do, and having the courage to do the right thing. Being loyal to those around you, standing by your family and friends when they need you there beside them.
2. *Respect* – treating others with respect even if you do not agree with their position on any given topic. It’s using good manners and *not* bad language when having dialogue over disagreements.
3. *Responsibility* – Doing what you are supposed to do; and always doing your best. It’s understanding that your words, actions and attitude can set the tone of any situation, and that there are consequences to everything we do, say or think.
4. *Fairness* – treating others fairly even when it would be easy and/or profitable to you to take advantage of others. Fairness includes playing by the rules and listening to the thoughts and ideas of others.
5. *Caring* – Remembering to be kind and compassionate to others.

So how do we teach our children and grandchildren to be good citizens? For certain, one of the best ways to do that is to lead by example. BE that good citizen and talk about what citizenship means to you! Strive to be a person of excellence in all that you do.

Another good way is to have discussions with family members about what it means to be a good citizen, and help our children / grandchildren see that they too can be a good citizen in every group they belong to. Below are some sample discussion questions you can start off with:

1. What makes someone a good citizen?
2. Why is it important to stay *informed* and get a good education as part of good citizenship?

3. Do you know people in your life who you think are good citizens? What things do they do that make you see them that way?
4. Being a good citizen doesn't just fall on adults. What are some examples of little things kids can do to contribute to the common good of our community and make the world a better place?
5. What sorts of things have you done that make the world a little bit better?

An early 19<sup>th</sup> Century French-born Quaker Missionary and Poet, Stephen Grellet (1773-1855), who came to America in the late 1790's and spent the rest of his life here, is credited with a beautiful and simple poem that speaks eloquently of what a good citizen looks like, although no one can independently verify his authorship. Whether this gentleman wrote the poem or not, the words are both poignant and commendable. Songs have been created out of these words, and they are worthy of being taught to our children. The poem? "I shall not pass this way again":

*I expect to pass through this world but once.  
Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any  
fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it,  
for I shall not pass this way again.*

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