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## FCE 2024 Character Counts Essay Contest

### Citizenship

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” -Margaret Mead. When discussing the importance of a word, it's paramount to define what the meaning of the word is beforehand, to avoid confusion from occurring. For a homonym like Citizenship, used often in present discussions of immigration, society and other such topics, this is even more crucial. In this paper, I will cover the definition of citizenship and how to act as a citizen in a serviceable manner.

To me, there are many parts that make up citizenship. For one to be a good citizen, they must foster a good community, by surrounding themselves with good people and being virtuous themselves. This can be achieved in many ways itself, but an adequate example of a respectful community member is someone who values the input of others, and does not view opposition as outright hostility. In a world with so many people, there's bound to be purposefully ignorant and disrespectful individuals; sometimes trying to find common ground with them can feel like talking to an iron wall. Someone who can keep their head level and not let this perpetuated malice interfere with their views of the world is someone capable of fostering healthy relationships and community.

Another part of being a good citizen is contributing to your community. Some ways people can do this are by visiting local establishments, such as libraries, parks and businesses. In a world where we spend most of our time online, the importance of getting outside and interacting with people outside your own home is more important than ever. Not only can you find valuable friendship with other people, you can also help support the people who run these establishments.

People who live their lives in the manners stated above tend to foster better relationships. A good citizen will have an easier time making and maintaining friendships regardless of the person they're interacting with's age, gender, religious beliefs, etc. The importance of having strong bonds with people among your community cannot be understated. Aside from just being a healthy habit, these bonds are what form towns, countries, and societies themselves. Without amicable human interaction, the world as we know it would not exist. The strongest countries and empires in history were built off of humans being human with each other.

Throughout all of time, a large cornerstone of forming relationships with people has been having a similar outlook on life. For lots of people, this takes the form of religion. Through following a certain belief, many find comfort and reassurance for their existence. Although religion is a personal journey, there's many aspects of it that relate back to citizenship. For centuries, mankind has bonded through devotion to certain gods and deities. Depending on which religion you follow, there is also often a set of laws that

one can choose to follow to strengthen their ties to said religion. There is communion in this, as well.

In many ways, the foundation of all countries lay in the hands of its people's citizenship. Without a cooperative population, a country cannot stand. However, it's not very hard for people to bond over sharing a space. There's a sense of pride that comes with living in a certain place as well. A desire to be the best is what drives people to better their community and work hard to be excellent citizens. Unfortunately, this can be destructive to others, especially the less fortunate. Lots of history consists of different communities contending with others. Think of wars, colonization, class disparities, racism, and so on. For some people, one of the easiest ways to make yourself and the people around you look better is to put the other groups down.

We can get a good gauge of how often this happens by looking at our world today. The news seems to be a constant stream of negativity, showcasing the unfortunate reality of our world. It's important to remember that one day, the present day will be history, and we should try our best to leave a positive impact on it, no matter how small. Voicing your support for not just your own community and country but others is one of the greatest shows of citizenship there is.

On a global scale, there are so many flourishing and welcoming communities out there, created by and for people just like you. This is important to keep in mind as you move through life; even if it may not feel like it in the moment, there is always a place

you can feel a sense of belonging to. By voicing your opinions, staying true to your beliefs and seeking out other people, it will not be too hard to find. Neutrality towards life is not always the wisest mindset.

It's hard to tell what citizenship will look like in the future, both near and far. Whether you believe society will collapse within the next 5 years, or you believe that humans will be inhabiting this earth for a long time yet, it's important to harbor the relationships you've created thus far. Familial or friendship, both are just as important for a quality life and enjoyable future.

In conclusion, there are many principal aspects to being a good citizen. One of them being, of course, maintaining a healthy relationship with the outside world. Going outside often and interacting with the people of your community is one of if not the most important thing you can do as a member of a town, county, and even country. Keeping a level-headed attitude is another crucial part of living as a citizen; this includes preserving relationships with individuals who have differing viewpoints as you. Being able to see both sides of an issue is a wonderful skill to have. All in all, listening to others, learning from others, and harboring empathy towards others will get you a long way.

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