



1 6 T H A N N U A L

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association  
**Essay Contest**



 PUEBLO CITY-COUNTY  
**Library District**

Sponsored by the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association  
and Pueblo City-County Library District

# Pueblo Home of Heroes Association

The mission of the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association is to preserve and expand the memorial dedicated to Medal of Honor recipients; to advance the history of the Medal of Honor; honor the legacy of those who have received the Award nationwide; to promote democratic ideals; and encourage among the people of the United States, and especially its youth, citizenship, character, integrity, and selflessness as epitomized by the Medal of Honor.

The Pueblo Medal of Honor Association began in 1997 when Robert H. Rawlings, owner and publisher of The Pueblo Chieftain, began a project to create a Memorial as a lasting testament featuring bronze statues honoring Pueblo's four Medal of Honor recipients: William J. Crawford – Army WWII, Carl L. Sitter – Marines Korea, Raymond G. "Jerry" Murphy – Marines Korea, and Drew D. Dix – Army Vietnam. Additionally, the names of all the over 3,500 recipients of the Medal of Honor would be listed on granite plaques.

This Association successfully bid for, and brought to Pueblo, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for their national convention in September of 2000. It was held at the time of the unveiling of the Medal of Honor Memorial. Ninety-seven out of 147 Medal of Honor recipients living at the time were in attendance, which allowed thousands of Pueblans, and Coloradoans, to be able to meet and visit with America's greatest military heroes.

In 2009, the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association created this essay contest to draw the attention of Pueblo students to the true heroism represented by the recipients of the Medal of Honor. The Association raises money for JROTC scholarships, upkeep of the

Medal of Honor memorial, as well as a Medal of Honor interactive display inside the Convention Center. The Association also assisted with the data base for the Veteran's Bridge at the Riverwalk.

In 2017, this group again brought the Congressional Medal of Honor Society national convention to Pueblo where 40 of the 79 living recipients were in attendance.

The Pueblo Home of Heroes Association funded the renovation of the window display inside the Convention Center in June of 2022, and created an interactive display with a 12'X 7' screen for visitors to view information about Pueblo's Medal of Honor Recipients, how the Pueblo sculptures were created, information about the Medal of Honor, information on those listed on the Veteran's Bridge at HARP, and attractions around Pueblo including over 30 military monuments and memorials in the area. This display is free and open to the public any time the Convention Center is open.

Currently the Pueblo Home of Heroes Association is hosting a podcast featuring Pueblo area veterans and their stories. These podcasts are available on Spotify and [www.pueblohomeofheroes.org](http://www.pueblohomeofheroes.org) (select the icon entitled Pueblo Veterans and their Stories).

This summer a new virtual feature will be added to the Walk of Valor around the Riverwalk to enable walkers to utilize their cellphones using QR codes to gain information about the various stops which highlight Pueblo Veterans, our heroes (military and civilian) who are the reason Pueblo is called Home of Heroes.



This display is free and open to the public during regular hours at the Pueblo Convention Center.



# Pueblo Home of Heroes Association Essay Contest 2024

## P R O M P T - S T U D E N T S

### “What does it mean to be a U.S. Citizen?”

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association, in cooperation with Pueblo City-County Library District, is pleased to announce the winners of the 16th annual essay contest.

The following guidelines were required:

- All entries must be typed.
- 300 – 500 words for grades 4 and 5
- 400 – 700 words for grades 6-8
- 500 – 1,000 words for grades 9-12

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association judges were Kevin Cover, Gary and Karen Micheli, Margo Hatton, Don and Mary Gray, Jim and Paulette Stuart, and Ray LeMasters. There were 358 entries this year.

Pueblo Home of Heroes Association and Pueblo City-County Library District wish to thank teachers and parents for encouraging their students and children to participate in this essay contest.

A special thanks to the Pueblo City-County Library District for their assistance each year with this essay contest.

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# Winners

## Elementary School

**1st place – Stormie Manzanares**

Park View Elementary, age 11, Mrs. Henry

**2nd place – Maricela Berumen**

Eva Baca Elementary, age 11, Ms. Essien

**3rd place – Gunnison Mutz**

Cedar Ridge Elementary, age 9, Mrs. Runyan

**Honorable Mention – Joseph Barcos, Jr.**

Park View Elementary, age 10, Mrs. Henry

**Honorable Mention – Elias Matamoras**

Eva Baca Elementary, age 9, Mrs. Mancilla

## Middle School

**1st place – Jack Mandarich**

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Ms. Chavez

**2nd place – Carlee Langston**

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Ms. Chavez

**3rd place – Campbell Bowen**

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Ms. Chavez

**Honorable Mention – Logan Patten**

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Ms. Chavez

**Honorable Mention – Liam Todd**

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Ms. Chavez

## High School

**1st place – Ryan Szakal**

Pueblo West High School, age 17, 1SGT Dilcher

**2nd place – Mia Montanez**

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

**3rd place – Emma Perry**

Pueblo South High School, age 16, Ms. Genova

**Honorable Mention – Danilynn Frick**

Rye High School, age 15, Mr. Estes

**Honorable Mention – McKenzie Greenwood**

Pueblo West High School, age 17, LTC Emond

# Stormie Manzanares

1<sup>st</sup> Place, Elementary School

Park View Elementary, age 11, Mrs. Henry

To many people, being a U.S. Citizen means obeying laws and respecting authority. To others, it may mean to love your country. Being a U.S. Citizen means much more than just obeying laws and respecting authority. Being a U.S. citizen means being responsible, following rules, and showing respect for authority. It also means displaying citizenship by being kind, caring, trustworthy, and dependable.

It also means to make a positive impact on our community. We can do this by voting, and getting involved, and as citizens, we must contribute positively to our society as well. Let us be proud of our country and show our love for it by being responsible, respectful, and caring individuals who make a positive difference in our communities.

As responsible citizens, we must abide by the law, pay taxes, actively participate in national defense, and attend school. These actions collectively contribute to building a better society, community, and country. Being a U.S. Citizen comes with its own set of privileges, which can be enjoyed if we fulfill

our responsibilities. Our duties, such as paying taxes, not only benefit us but also help in the development of better schools, communities, and employment opportunities for all.

Being a U.S. Citizen entails fulfilling one's responsibilities and contributing to the greater good of the nation. It means striving to become a better person and setting a positive example for others to follow. By actively participating in civic duties and embracing democratic values, we can work towards building a stronger and more prosperous society. If every citizen does their part, we can collectively achieve greatness and create a brighter future for ourselves and generations to come.

Our country is already great, but if each one of us plays our part, we can elevate it to greater heights. Being a U.S. Citizen means having a place to become your best self or even a place to be free. When you fulfill your duties, you get to live in a great country.



# Maricela Berumen

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Elementary School

Eva Baca Elementary, age 11, Ms. Essien

Ronald Reagan once said, “Good citizenship and defending democracy means living up to the ideals and values that make this country great.” Protecting the constitution, speaking out, and respecting others is a good way to become a good U.S citizen.

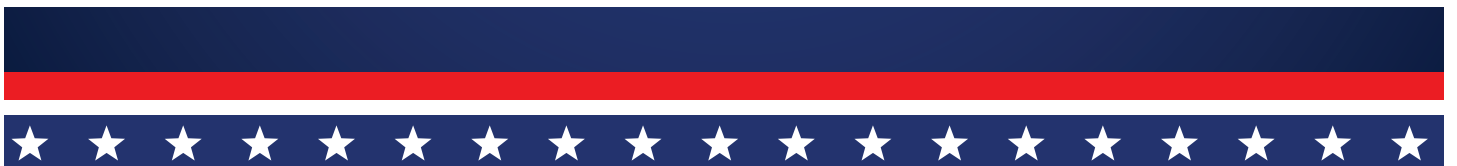
To begin, protecting the constitution is a way to be a good citizen. One of the ways to protect the constitution is to serve in a jury. You can also join the army or military. Serving in the military also means you have to protect your country in a time of war. Some people also volunteer in a war. During a time of need, countries may be in a war and will require help from citizens. An example of people protecting the constitution is Pat Tillman. According to the article, “National Football Foundation,” “Pat Tillman was an outstanding football player and scholar who left the National Football League as a young star to enlist in the military following the September 11 attacks. He lost his life during a combat mission in Afghanistan.” This shows how loyal Pat Tillman was to his country.

Secondly, speaking out is a big part of being a U.S. citizen. The first amendment is freedom of speech. This means that anyone can say anything at any time. Even if it’s a protest. In 1966, there were protests for the freedom of black people. Black and white people did not have the same rights. Black people were treated poorly. Different colored people would often go to different schools, drink at different water fountains,

and black people had to give up their seats on the bus if a white person wanted their seat. An African-American woman named Rosa Parks, was on the bus, a white person asked for her seat and she told them no. The bus driver ordered her to move out of her seat. Rosa then peacefully protested by not changing seats. Another example is Phillip Randolph. Black people weren’t getting hired for jobs because of their skin color. This caused Phillip Randolph to protest peacefully against discrimination in Washington with a demand to end segregation.

Finally, respecting others is a way to be a good U.S citizen. You could also use your manners. If you need to go somewhere and someone is in your way, you can say “excuse me” or “pardon me.” By respecting others, you could respect their choices. If someone makes a choice you don’t agree with, accept it anyways. It’s their choice to make and we just need to accept their choices. You could also help someone if they’re struggling. For example, if your neighbor is an elder and falls and can’t get up, you may help them and make sure they’re okay.

In my opinion, protecting the constitution, speaking out, and respecting others is what makes a good U.S citizen. I learned how to be a good citizen. “Citizenship is the chance to make a difference to the place where you belong.” - Charles Handy





# Gunnison Mutz

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Elementary School

Cedar Ridge Elementary, age 9, Mrs. Runyan

“To the young, your American citizenship is priceless and worth fighting for, if necessary, to retain it,” stated by James L. Stone, United States Army Medal of Honor recipient. Being a citizen in the United States of America is an honor because it comes with great responsibility, which includes respect, equality and freedom.

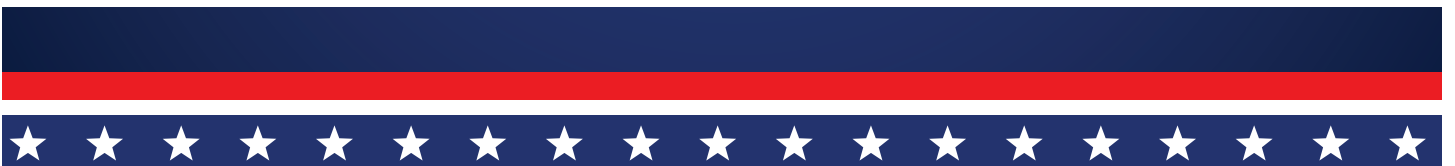
Being a United States citizen requires responsibility and respect. Responsibility and respect is not hard. They could be as simple as removing your hat for the flag and voting in elections. By doing those things you show respect and responsibility. Some others are following the law, having integrity and being honest. Never in my life have I ever disobeyed the law. Good citizenship can be demonstrated by thanking current and past military service men and women.

Equality is really important to me. Equality is important to me because I believe everyone should be treated equally. Having equality means not judging people by their skin color and treating everyone with the same respect they deserve. Equality means no

matter what background a person comes from, always treat them with respect and kindness. Another way to show equality is to not judge people by their religion and beliefs.

In the United States of America, we have many freedoms. These include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom to celebrate holidays. I have the right to say my opinion and share my thoughts with other people. Being a citizen means I can honor the flag by putting my hand on my heart for the Pledge of Allegiance. Another freedom of being a citizen is I get to go to school for free until I graduate high school.

I am blessed to be a citizen of the United States and to live in this awesome country. The United States of America is amazing because it allows us to have freedom, responsibility and equality. Being a citizen of this great nation is an honor, and I will hold true to the red, white and blue.





# Joseph Barcos, Jr.

Honorable Mention, Elementary School

Park View Elementary, age 10, Mrs. Henry

Being a U.S. citizen means that you have certain rights and responsibilities. As a citizen, you have the right to vote, to run for public office, and to obtain a U.S. passport. You also have the responsibility to obey the law, to pay taxes, and to serve on a jury if called upon. Additionally, U.S. citizens are entitled to certain protections under the law, such as the right to due process and freedom of speech. Being a U.S. citizen is a privilege that comes with great responsibilities and opportunities.

Being a U.S. citizen comes with responsibilities. Citizens are expected to obey the law, pay taxes, and serve on a jury if called upon. These responsibilities ensure that the country operates fairly and efficiently for everyone. Additionally, citizens have a responsibility to serve their community by volunteering, helping to clean up the community, or simply being a good neighbor.

One of the most important responsibilities of being a U.S. citizen is obeying the law. Citizens are expected to follow all federal, state, and local laws. This includes paying taxes, serving on a jury if called upon, and following all traffic laws. Failure to follow the law can result in serious consequences, including fines and imprisonment.

Another responsibility of U.S. citizenship is serving the community. This can take many forms, such as volunteering at a local charity, helping to clean up the community, or simply being a good neighbor. By

working together, citizens can make their community a better place to live for everyone.

Being a U.S. citizen means being part of a community. Citizens have a responsibility to serve their community by volunteering, helping to clean up the community, or simply being a good neighbor. By doing so, citizens can make their community a better place to live for everyone.

Also, being a U.S. citizen also means being a part of a country that values diversity and inclusivity. Citizens have the power to make decisions about their government and with that power comes the responsibility to ensure that all people are treated fairly and justly.

In conclusion, being a U.S. citizen is about more than just having a passport. It is about being a part of a community that values democracy, freedom, and justice. As a citizen, you have the power to make a difference in your community and to uphold the values that make this country great. Being a U.S. citizen is a privilege that comes with great responsibilities and opportunities. Citizens have the power to make decisions about their government, and with that power comes the responsibility to obey the law, pay taxes, and serve their community. Upholding these rights and responsibilities is essential to ensure that the country remains a great place to live for all citizens.



# Elias Matamoras

Honorable Mention, Elementary School

Eva Baca Elementary, age 9, Mrs. Mancilla

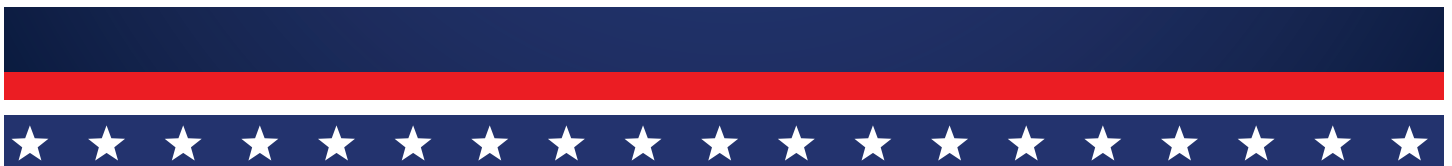
“The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his own weight.”

A U.S. citizen is someone who was born in the United States of America. Citizens have many rights and freedoms, but they also have many responsibilities. The Bill of Rights is like a list of rules that helps protect important freedoms and rights that people have. We have rights to own guns and we have jury trials in civil cases.

To begin, a citizen of the United States is granted many rights and freedoms. When you're 18 you get the right to vote, and you can even be elected to a government job too! Other rights of citizens may include the rights to follow any religion and to speak freely. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.

To add, a citizen of the United States has many responsibilities and obligations. Citizens are responsible for paying taxes and obeying the country's laws. As a citizen, your responsibility is to obey laws, pay taxes and vote when you're 18 years old. One of the most important responsibilities Americans have is voting. The U.S. is a democracy which promotes a sense of community and the people having power. Voting is a responsibility as well as a right. We the people get to decide who is running our cities, states, and country. Elected officials enforce or put into effect, laws that affect the whole country.

Every country has its own rules about who is a citizen and how to become one. We are lucky enough to be a citizen just because we live here and people before us already fought for our freedom. I can be a personally responsible citizen, a participatory citizen, and a social justice-oriented citizen.



# Jack Mandarich

1<sup>st</sup> Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

As William J. Clinton said, “Each generation of Americans must define what it means to be an American.” I love this quote because he says that all American citizens must, not should, define what it means to be a U.S. citizen. Only then can we see the beauty of diversity be made into one country, realize how good our lives are, and respect and appreciate the brave people that gave their lives for our freedom.

I think that being a U.S. citizen does not mean that you were born and raised in the U.S., but rather anyone can become one, and I think that the mixing of all cultures is a wonderful thing. Like Oprah Winfrey said, “It’s important because we let people know why America is what it is. It is about an ideal, and that ideal is freedom for everybody.” This country was founded on freedom, and while there always are, and will always will be, people that are blinded by greed and hate, the U.S. was meant for people from all places. It is morally wrong to reject any person from our country, for that is going against what our country and constitution were based on; a land of opportunity. With that, I feel that sometimes, people immigrating to our country only become citizens to take advantage of the privileges we offer. I think that we shouldn’t take what they can, but meet the rights of citizenship halfway and do our part to better the name of our country. Ever since the immigrants of Ellis Island in the 1890s, to people moving to our country today, the U.S. has been a melting pot, so diversified, but made one, unique country where, as Emma Lazarus wrote in, “The New Colossus,” “Huddled masses yearn to breathe free.” From all the different food and music, to the separate beliefs and religions, as a U.S. citizen, we have the freedom of so many choices and opportunities.

I also believe that U.S. citizens should be more grateful for the freedoms so willingly given to us. I think some people don’t realize that we as Americans

get so many freedoms, while many other people from many different countries can’t say the same. From being able to wake up in the morning in peace and see your family, to being able to easily go to school for free, to being able to choose who we want to be, we sometimes don’t take time to appreciate the simple things that we have so good that other countries wish they had. We as Americans often complain about things they don’t want to do, like go to school. What we don’t realize is that there are kids that nearly die each and every day trying to get to school in bad environments because they want an education so bad. I also think that all Americans should be conscious of how many resources we use that other countries may not have that we take for granted. The average American household uses 80 to 100 gallons of water per day, which I think is crazy when people in other countries don’t even have clean water to drink! As John F. Kennedy once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you could do for your country.” There is a line between taking advantage of the freedoms we have, and respecting those freedoms, and it should be our life’s work to stay on the right side of that line.

In conclusion, I am very thankful to live in the United States of America, the land of opportunity, where many cultures make one country where anything is possible. To me, being a U.S. citizen means to be grateful for the freedoms and opportunities that many courageous people give their lives for, and it is our sacred duty to uphold and respect the different cultures that make up the melting pot of our free country.



# Carlee Langston

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

The factual definition of being a U.S. citizen means being born in America, by law, or by naturalization. There are many amazing things that come with being a citizen that the average American doesn't think about on a regular basis. We get bountiful rights, freedoms, and pleasures that other countries in the world don't allow. It is also the citizens' duty to honor, take pride in, and care for our great country.

As Americans, we have privileges that other citizens from other countries do not. In the U.S. Constitution, there are 27 Amendments in which all of our freedoms are listed. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of petition are the privileges displayed in the First Amendment. Not only do we get to believe in what we want to but, we also get to freely share what we think about a topic. Secondly, being an American citizen means you get rights that the government cannot take away from you. Some of those are the right to bear arms, women's right to vote, right to vote at age eighteen, and right to run for an elected office. For example, the right to bear arms (2nd Amendment) allows Americans to both protect themselves and provide for their families. Freedom of religion is also allowed in America unlike other countries. We as citizens get to choose what we want to worship and this privilege is often taken for granted. Our freedoms didn't come without a cost. Many brave men and women gave their lives for our country so we could have these freedoms. Last of all, America is a democracy where everyone gets to vote for who they want. As Abraham Lincoln said in the Gettysburg Address, "...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." In America, citizens have ample opportunities, freedoms, and rights. It is the choice of each United States citizen to strive to their full potential.

Another thing that comes with being a citizen of the United States is the responsibility of taking care of the land and representing it well. First of all, attending school and following laws are taught from the very beginning. When we are young we are taught that if you do not graduate from high school or obey laws, your future will not be very bright. Next, it is our duty to defend our country and have involvement in our community. The Second Amendment allows citizens to bear arms so we should want to protect our country from harm. Another important responsibility of citizens of the U.S. is having connections with people and being incorporated in your community's events and activities. Finally, it is our responsibility as a citizen to participate in government by attending jury duty when called, voting, and paying taxes. It is essential for Americans to participate in these things in order for life to go on as we know it. Living in the United States has its pleasures and privileges. It is our duty to take care of our country by following the law, taking part in our community and government as well as defending the rights and freedoms that were established in 1776.

Being a U.S. citizen does not just mean living here. It is our job to contribute to society in a positive way so that we can enjoy this great nation under God. Opportunities, freedoms, rights, responsibilities, and obligations come with living in America. If everyone just plays and never works or tries, our country will fall apart. As Americans we should want to honor and take pride in our country.



# Campbell Bowen

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

To me, being a U.S. citizen allows me to have many freedoms that other countries don't have. One of the many freedoms is the First Amendment, the freedom of speech. The First Amendment allows any U.S. citizen to speak freely without being suppressed or censored. Also, part of the First Amendment is the freedom of religion. Freedom of religion allows an American citizen to practice no religion or a religion. Therefore, as a citizen we can choose to be Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, or nothing at all. We can choose to worship God, Jesus, Holy Spirit or the Universe or not to worship at all. The First Amendment includes the right of citizens to peacefully assemble and protest. This amendment gives citizens the right to speak, have an opinion, verbally or written, agree or disagree, and stand up for their rights and beliefs. Due Process of Law allows a person to be innocent until proven guilty. This allows a person to go before a judge and jury to have a safe and factual trial. Every citizen that turns 18 years of age has the right to register to vote. A voter can vote in local, state, or federal elections. The Second Amendment is about whether the country needs to

have a militia or military that is well established and allows citizens to freely bear arms. This amendment allows citizens the right to keep and bear arms or weapons. The United States is made up of many cultures, meaning citizens' arts, beliefs, languages, way they dress, religions, and rituals that are passed down from generation to generation. The U.S. is made up of many cultures, races, religions, and attracts people by the flocks for the freedoms we're allowed to experience. As citizens we are allowed to pick our professions, make money, enjoy the hobbies of our choice, get a free education, and dream big! People signed up to be patriots and protect our freedoms. I'm grateful for these men and women that fought, shed blood, came home, or ultimately sacrificed their lives for the many freedoms we enjoy today. There are so many freedoms I did not list but I'm proud to be an American citizen. In conclusion, to be a U.S. citizen to me means that I have the privilege to live in the greatest country in the world.





# Logan Patten

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

To become a United States citizen, being an immigrant means more than simply entering the United States. Former President Barack Obama once similarly stated that being an American is about loyalty to the founding principles and having faith in the idea that anyone, from anywhere, can contribute to our nation's story. A quote that resonates with Mr. Obama's statement is from former President Woodrow Wilson, whose Irish immigrant grandparents came to America. President Wilson once stated, "Becoming an American citizen was to improve the ideals of humanity, broaden their perspectives, and eliminate divisiveness while promoting unity." Regardless of why one should feel a need to leave their home country or nation, the ultimate goal remains - to build a better future for themselves and others.

To introduce another part of what it's like to become a U.S. citizen is the freedom that an individual may possess. The form of government used in the United States, a Republic, might seem rather exquisite to those whose country may use a different form of government. Benefits include being allowed to vote for the leader of your country and becoming eligible to work federal jobs, as well as start businesses and become entrepreneurs. United States citizens can improve their social status and improve through their skills or work ethic rather than being kept at a certain level. Also, children born in the U.S. would automatically register as citizens of the United States. As a citizen of the U.S., you have the benefit of traveling out of the country using a U.S. passport, which will ensure the assistance of the U.S. government outside of America.

Although there are many benefits to becoming a citizen of the United States, there are several responsibilities that one must abide by if one wishes to keep one's citizenship. A few of these responsibilities are as follows.

One must give up all prior allegiance to any other nation or sovereignty, swear allegiance to the United States, support and defend the Constitution and the laws of the U.S., and serve the country when required. These requirements are necessary when becoming a registered citizen of the United States.

The meaning of being a citizen of the United States is more than just a few things. Without freedom of speech, how would one know what great voices reside in this exquisite country? I rather enjoy the fact that due to mainly freedom of speech, our nation hasn't anything such as segregation on the streets. Due to that same fact, women can now enjoy rights as a person and be allowed to share their opinions just as men do. I feel a great sensation of pride that we are fortunate enough to be allowed to choose our leader rather than being dictated to by an all-ruling oppressor or possibly venerating under rule of a monarchy. I also enjoy that no one is subjected to any specific religion and can live peacefully knowing they can believe whatever they desire.

In conclusion, being a citizen of the United States is quite the opportunity. It means one may live freely and peacefully and believe whatever religion they choose. That one can start their businesses, make their profits, and grow their status to whatever they choose. One can freely speak one's mind. The people run the U.S. and create freedom throughout this country. "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." - Nelson Mandela - E Pluribus Unum - From many, One.



# Liam Todd

Honorable Mention, Middle School

Vineland Middle School, age 14, Mrs. Chavez

Being a U.S. citizen means many things. These are some of the meanings behind being a U.S. citizen.

To me, being a U.S. citizen means to have the ability to do what you want, when you want, how you want, and where you want. It also means that you have freedoms and equal opportunities. In the Constitution, the amendments give us freedoms such as the freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of petition. America was built on the idea that all men are created equal, and there's liberty and justice for all. These rights and ideas ensure that citizens can express themselves freely, practice their beliefs, and participate in public gatherings without fear of persecution. Freedom of speech allows citizens to express their opinions and ideas without fear of censorship. Freedom of religion ensures that individuals can practice their beliefs without interference from the government. Freedom of the press allows journalists to report news and information without censorship or intimidation. Freedom of assembly enables citizens to gather peacefully and protest or advocate for causes they believe in. Finally, the right to petition allows citizens to address grievances and seek changes in government policies or practices.

Alongside these rights come responsibilities. Citizens of the U.S. are expected to obey laws, pay taxes, serve on juries, and defend the country if

necessary. Obeying laws ensures society functions smoothly and fairly. Paying taxes funds necessities, such as schools, roads, and the military's budget to help defend our great country. Serving on juries ensures that individuals have a fair trial by their peers, upholding the principle of justice. And defending the country, if called upon, protects the nation's freedom and security.

Moreover, U.S. citizenship is more than just legal status, it's about identity and belonging. As US citizens, we are part of a diverse and inclusive community united by shared values and aspirations. These values include democracy, equality, freedom, and opportunity. Regardless of our backgrounds, beliefs, or cultures, we are all Americans, and we share a common bond that transcends our differences. This shared identity gives us a sense of pride and belonging and strengthens our communities and nation as a whole.

In conclusion, being a U.S. citizen means enjoying certain rights, fulfilling responsibilities, and embracing a shared identity. By exercising our rights, fulfilling our duties, and embracing our identity as U.S. citizens, we contribute to the strength and vitality of our nation and its people.





# Ryan Szakal

1<sup>st</sup> Place, High School

Pueblo West High School, age 17, 1SGT Dilcher

Being a U.S. citizen means more than just having legal papers. It's like being part of a big family with certain rules and traditions. In this essay, I'll talk about the cool stuff like rights, the different cultures, opportunities for success, and also the not-so-cool challenges that citizens need to help fix.

Now, let's dive into a superhero analogy. Imagine you have this incredible power called freedom of speech. It's like having a voice that can be heard, a superpower that not everyone in the world has. As a U.S. citizen, this power is part of your everyday life. You can share your thoughts, opinions, and ideas freely. It's a bit like being a superhero with a megaphone. But, here's the catch. Being in this superhero club also means you have responsibilities. It's not just about enjoying your powers; you need to use them wisely. Voting in elections is one of those responsibilities. It's like being a superhero who decides the fate of the city, in this case, your country. Staying informed is crucial too. It's like having a superhero radar to know what's going on, so you can make informed decisions. Being a U.S. citizen is not just about having rights, it's about being a responsible superhero in the grand scheme of the nation.

Now, let's talk about our giant family. Being in this family is like attending the most exciting and diverse family reunion. There's Uncle Sam from the Northeast, Auntie Maria from the Southwest, and Cousin Jamal from the Midwest. Everyone bringing their unique flavor to the mix. Our cultural potluck makes our country colorful and exciting, just like a family album with photos from all around the world.

Our special symbols, like the American flag, are not just pieces of cloth, they're like family heirlooms passed down through generations. When we see the flag waving, it's a reminder that we're all part of something big. A family that believes in certain values and principles. Our traditions, whether it's a Thanksgiving feast or Fourth of July fireworks, are

like family rituals that bond us together. Being a U.S. citizen means you're not just a member of this family, you actively participate in making it vibrant and diverse.

Now, let's talk about the golden ticket - the ticket to chasing dreams. It's like having a backstage pass to the concert of life. As a U.S. citizen, you have opportunities that not everyone in the world gets. Education is your playground, jobs are your stage, and the American Dream is your playlist. It's not just about working hard; it's about having the chance to turn those dreams into reality.

The American Dream isn't some distant fantasy, it's a journey you embark on. It's like being on an exciting adventure, and citizenship is your passport. You can go to college, start a business, or pursue any career path you choose. The American Dream isn't just for a lucky few, it's for every citizen who's willing to grab that golden ticket and dance to their own tune. Being a U.S. citizen means you're not just dreaming; you're actively pursuing those dreams, making them a reality for yourself and, in turn, contributing to the collective dream of a thriving nation.

Now, let's address the not so cool stuff, the challenges we face as a nation. Picture it like a game, a big game where we all play on the same team U.S.A. But, just like any game, there are obstacles. Unfairness and racism are like opponents we need to tackle together. It's not about winning alone; it's about working as a team player to overcome these challenges.

As citizens, we don't just sit on the sidelines, we get in the game. It's like being a team player in a big football match. You don't just cheer; you actively play your part. You contribute to discussions, participate in community initiatives, and advocate for positive change. Being a U.S. citizen means you're not just enjoying the stuff, you're rolling up your sleeves and helping fix the not-so-cool stuff. It's like being



a superhero, not just in moments of triumph but in times of challenge, standing up for justice and fairness.

In a nutshell, being a U.S. citizen is like having a front-row seat to the greatest show on Earth, the show of life. It's not about having a title, it's about being an active member of a community, a participant in the grand narrative of a diverse family, a dreamer chasing opportunities, and a team player tackling

challenges. It's about enjoying the journey together, with the rights and responsibilities that come with the superhero membership. So, here's to being a U.S. citizen embracing the cool perks, facing the challenges, and contributing to the ongoing story of a nation that's more than just a place on the map. It's a community, a family, an adventure and you're an integral part of it all.



# Mia Montanez

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, High School

Pueblo West High School, LTC Emond

Being a citizen of the United States is a complex responsibility that includes civic engagement, understanding historical views, especially in light of the civil rights struggle, and striking a delicate balance between rights and obligations. American citizenship is founded on a set of rights granted to individuals by the Constitution, which provide freedoms such as free speech, religion, and assembly. However, these rights come with responsibilities, highlighting citizens' need to actively participate in the democratic process, contribute to the growth of society, and defend the ideas that define the nation. Civic involvement is critical to molding the United States' collective future, as residents are encouraged to be knowledgeable, involved, and responsible stewards of their communities. To fully appreciate the changing story of American citizenship, one must possess a sophisticated awareness of historical views, especially those concerning the challenges and victories of the civil rights movement. Citizens are further reminded of their active involvement in influencing the future of the country by studying the past, which provides insight into the continuous pursuit of equality and fairness.

As Americans, we have constitutional rights and responsibilities to uphold through active participation in our country's political processes. As citizens of the United States, we inherit rights guaranteed by the Constitution that serve as the foundation for our freedoms in the country. These rights include the ability to express our opinions, gather peacefully, and participate in various aspects of civic life. However, these rights come with the obligation to actively participate in the democratic processes that govern our society. This duty includes remaining informed about political and social issues, using our right to vote in elections, and effectively contributing to improving our local and national communities. The combination of our rights and responsibilities forms a shared relationship, through which our participation is a civic duty and a means of preserving and fostering the democratic ideals that define the United States. By accepting this dual role, citizens become essential contributors to the ongoing story of a vibrant democracy.

Civic engagement refers to the active participation of U.S. citizens in their communities and democracy, which includes activities such as voting, staying informed, and contributing to societal well-being. Participating in the joint operations of the United States is a prerequisite for citizenship. Being an active member of a large team is similar to civic engagement. Voting is one method to be a member of this team; by doing so, you can select individuals to represent the group and determine key guidelines. It's important to keep yourself informed about national and local affairs in addition to voting. Being informed allows you to discuss topics that are important to you. Being a good team player also entails taking action to improve your community, such as lending a hand or advocating for improvements. Therefore, citizenship in the United States is like belonging to a team where everyone plays a part in improving things and cooperating for the benefit of all.

Being aware of historical perspectives, especially the Civil Rights Movement, is key to being a citizen of the United States because it offers important insights into the setbacks and victories that have influenced the country's continuous pursuit of justice and equality. Understanding the Civil Rights Movement in particular helps one to grasp the narrative of how the U.S. has fought to guarantee that everyone is treated equally. People battled courageously for equal rights in the 1950s and 60s, including the ability to vote and the expectation of equal treatment regardless of skin color or gender. Understanding this struggle makes us more appreciative of the achievements our nation has made. But acknowledging that there is still work to be done goes beyond simply looking back. By being aware of our past, we can come together as citizens to guarantee that everyone has an equal chance at a happy life and that our nation keeps moving on the right path.

In essence, being a U.S. citizen involves a delicate balance of enjoying certain rights while shouldering important responsibilities. Civic engagement, which includes active participation in the democratic process, staying informed, and contributing to community well-



being, is the driving force behind a strong and inclusive nation. Essentially, having certain rights and carrying significant responsibilities is a delicate balance that comes with being a citizen of the United States. A robust and inclusive country is fueled by civic engagement, which entails actively participating in the democratic process, remaining informed, and enhancing community well-being. Furthermore, understanding past viewpoints-in particular, the lessons from the Civil Rights Movement-gives us important new perspectives on the ongoing fight for justice

and equality. We prepare ourselves to navigate the present and create a better tomorrow by acknowledging our shared history and the struggles endured in the past. As citizens, we participate in the process of creating a society that prioritizes justice, harmony, and the welfare of all of its members in addition to simply enjoying our rights. Every American citizen's informed and active participation becomes a vital component of this dynamic and ever-evolving democratic nation.



# Emma Perry

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, High School

Pueblo South High School, age 16, Ms. Genova

Imagine the U.S. today, enriched by freedoms that we all get to experience. Some of the freedoms we get to experience are stated in the First Amendment including freedom of speech, press, religion, right to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government. We also have the freedom to buy what we want, go where we want, and do what we want. Now, imagine you were in Greece, where my great-grandfather lived, somewhere between 1910 and 1920, when part of it was taken over by Turkey. This was the start of the Greco-Turkish war, and my great-grandfather was forced to flee his home. The Turkish people forced many Greeks to flee during this time and destroyed many historical monuments in Greece. My great-grandfather fled his home and came to America, the land of opportunity. During this time many other people faced similar experiences. To me, being a U.S. citizen is getting to embrace the freedoms that we are privileged to have, but also being able to let people like my great-grandfather have a chance to experience what being a U.S. citizen is all about.

Being a U.S. citizen means that we live in a land of opportunity but we also live in a land of freedom. We get to express who we are, do what we want, and most of all we get to be ourselves. We have the freedom to stand up for what is right and we can say what is on our minds. Being a U.S. citizen means that we can live our life how we want to. We also get to go to school unlike some countries. Going to school allows us to gain an education and allows us to get a job. Getting an education opens up all types of opportunities including getting your dream job or getting to travel if you learn a

language. Being a U.S. citizen means that I get a chance to get an education and have the freedom to do what I want.

I asked my close friend about what being a U.S. citizen and freedom meant to her, and her response stood out a lot to me. She said, "I get to be a part of how our nation is going to be run. I get a say in how our country will change and grow. I get to vote, and say what I want or need to, and I know our country will be in good hands. To me, freedom means I get the ability to live my life the way I choose." When I asked my mom the same question one thing stood out to me, they both said something along the lines of, "I get a say/part of how our nation will be run". The main reason this stood out to me was because as a U.S. citizen we get a say in how our nation is run, we get to vote on laws and who is elected into our government. Any U.S. citizen gets a chance to vote once they are old enough. It's not based on gender, race, or ethnicity; it is based on age and in some states if you are a felon.

Over all, to me being a U.S citizen is getting a chance to be free. We have the chance to get an education, say and do what we want, but most importantly that anyone who is a U.S. citizen gets the chance to be who they want to be. Anyone who comes to the U.S. gets a chance to experience the land of opportunity and to me, that is the most important thing.



# Danilynn Frick

Honorable Mention, High School

Rye High School, age 15, Mr. Estes

The definition of being a U.S. citizen is an individual who is a citizen to America by law, birth, or naturalization. But there is a much deeper meaning than a person who legally lives in America. America is filled with freedom and individual rights. It is a country where you get to choose where you work, who you vote for, what you believe in, and almost every other aspect of your life. America is a free country and you have the ability to live the life you want; this is what many refer to as the “American Dream”. Because part of being a U.S. citizen is more than legally living in the United States.

Being a U.S. citizen means that you have freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is protected by our first amendment rights. This allows us to express our opinions and ideas without the government interfering. Since we have the right to use our voice, we are expected to do just that as U.S. citizens. What made America free and what keeps us free is people using their voice for change. We are able to protest and work towards what we want to see. We are able to have a say in how our country is run. Part of freedom of speech is freedom of religion. In America we are able to worship the way we choose. The U.S. is made up of hundreds of different religions. Everyone has different values, beliefs, and morals, as U.S. citizens we respect others choices. You have the right to publicly show your faith and the right to keep it private. Freedom of religion is a huge part of being a U.S. citizen.

Another part of being a citizen of the United States is the right to keep and bear arms. This is protected by the second amendment. This protects individual’s rights to possess firearms. A lot of Americans use guns for hunting purposes, which is another part of being a U.S. citizen. Some use them for recreational purposes such as shooting sports and other competitions. Another traditional way guns are used is self-defense. Part of being a citizen of America is having the right

to protect your home, family, and yourself. You also have the choice to not own or be incorporated with firearms, because in America you get to choose how you live,

I think that loving your country and the people that fight for it is another important part of being a U.S. citizen. Every year on July fourth, 84% of Americans celebrate our country. On November 11, Americans celebrate all who have fought for our freedom. On May 27, Americans remember and honor all the lives that were lost fighting for our country. These are 3 days of the year that citizens take time to celebrate and honor our country. But being a U.S. citizen means doing this everyday, not the fireworks and food but the respect we give. Being a U.S. citizen means standing for the flag, thanking a veteran, helping the family of a soldier that didn’t come home, but most of all loving your country.

Overall being a U.S. citizen means you get to choose the way you live. You get to choose everything you do, this is freedom, but it doesn’t mean there aren’t consequences. If you do something wrong or hurt others, you will have consequences. Freedom doesn’t mean doing whatever you want without consequences, it means getting to do whatever you want knowing that affects what will happen next. Being a U.S. citizen means you speak when you want to see change and fight for what you believe in. It means you are able to practice your religion the way you choose. You have the right to protect yourself and others. It means you help someone in need. But mainly it means that despite the differences you respect how others choose to live and realize that living in a country that has different races, morals, religion, and values is something most people will never get to do and because of this you love your country and all who have fought to make it this way.





# McKenzie Greenwood

Honorable Mention

Pueblo West High School, age 17, LTC Emond

While it may be true that the technical definition of a U.S. Citizen can be found in the Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 which states: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” Even though this is the practical definition of what it means to be a U.S. citizen, I believe that being a citizen within America means a lot more than just being “naturalized” or “subject to jurisdiction.” America has so many great attributes that are provided to its citizens. Being a United States citizen is so important because you’re given opportunities that no one else has. To me, being a United States citizen means freedom, being a part of a community, and protection over your civil rights.

To begin with, America’s foundation is freedom, and freedom is a word known for many things in America. As a United States citizen, freedom means that I have the right to religion, government affairs(voting), cultural diversity, gainful employment, education, housing, etc. Even though freedom can be broken down into many different aspects, as listed above, freedom also means that you’re free from constraint and coercion in your choices. That is one of the biggest things I take into consideration when thinking about being a part of America. I get to have my own choices, without outside interference. Most of the countries that surround America are based on dictatorships and authoritarian governments. America differs from these other countries because as a U.S. citizen, you are given your freedom and you don’t have to appeal to the government and its needs.

In addition, most countries have dictatorships and authoritarian governments as stated above, and this causes their citizens to not get the luxury of being a part of a tight-knit community. Being an American citizen means you’re automatically accepted into this worldwide community that is not only diverse, but it gives people the opportunity to explore their

identity, develop a work ethic, and be encouraged to make achievements. Communities are so important for society because it’s where you grow up, where you’ll have a family and raise your kids, and where you’ll work, and make friends. Within America, some communities support each other and bring others up, there are so many benefits to being a part of a community, the type of benefits you’ll only receive when being a United States citizen. When mentioning the world benefits most people think of prizes or money, but being within an American community gives you something much better than that. I’ve noticed that communities within America have this support halo that shines off of them, being welcome to anyone, and supporting those who are having a hard time. Communities aren’t just about potlucks and fundraisers, communities are people who work together to better the world around them, and in America, we have those types of communities. As a United States citizen, I try to work inside and outside of my community and I work to better the society around me. America has raised its citizens in a positive community that knows how to and is encouraged to give back to the world.

Furthermore, to relate to what I said in paragraph one, being a United States citizen means having freedom. However, freedom is a word that can be used for many different aspects, for me having freedom as an American citizen means my rights will always be protected and shielded from the world. As a United States citizen, we all have rights, we have the right to religion, free speech, race, gender, culture, voting, fair trade, education, and many more. When being a United States citizen you get the opportunities for a lot of things that most countries don’t get. As an American citizen, it is important to remember that the United States is keen on protecting its citizens’ safety. An example of this is during emergencies, authorities provide many different documents and questions to ensure that they protect your right to





things like freedom of speech and treatment for a condition/emergency. The government within our country is working for the citizens. Our civil rights give us protection from each other while also giving us a chance to live without our government. Being a United States citizen means you'll never have to fear being overruled by the government, everything within America is the citizen's choice and we are never forced into or out of anything.

To summarize, being a United States citizen is a privilege because having protection over our freedom and rights is so important especially because some countries do not care about their citizens. Being a part

of American society is so special and important, we get the opportunity to grow and accomplish many things as a country that other countries and nations don't get. I believe that the United States is built around its citizens, our system is set up so citizens are built up and ready for success. There are some regulations and rules that come with being a citizen in the U.S. but those are set in place to help protect us and keep our nation great. Overall, being a United States citizen means you get to grow and be strong, successful, and independent with your friends, family, neighbors, community, and government.

