

QUICK

S T A R T S

These warm-up activities are handy for introducing your students to the “Responsibility” Act. Use these activities to get students to develop their own understanding of civic responsibility.



Post photographs by Jacob Riis, Dorothea Lange, and Sebastiao Salgado. Ask your class to talk about the social problems associated with poverty and industrialization that are represented in the photos. What causes these problems? What are the solutions? Who’s responsible for solving these problems? The government? The people in the picture? All of us?



After the bell rings, ignore the class until their talk becomes loud and boisterous. Then, choose one or two students arbitrarily and punish them (for example, with an extra homework assignment) for the class’s behavior. Let the class protest. Then, lead a discussion about who’s responsible for the class’s behavior? The teacher? The class—as individuals or as a group?



Choose a widespread problem that affects your students—litter, crime, drugs. What’s being done in your community to solve these problems? Who has taken responsibility? How do these problems affect your students? What power do they have to address such problems?



Post the Bill of Rights. Ask your students to develop a matching “Bill of Responsibilities.” For instance, we have the right to bear arms. What is a gun owner’s responsibility to others for the right he exercises? What are our responsibilities with regard to free speech or free association?



Responsibility in the headlines. Choose a criminal trial and initiate a class discussion. What happened in the case? Who’s responsible? Who’s to blame? What’s the difference between blame and responsibility? In the Oklahoma bombing case, for example, the trial will seek to determine whether the accused are to blame; however, some public discourse has assigned collateral responsibility to the militia groups that the defendants belong to.



Ask your students to discuss the concept of responsibility demonstrated by COPS in San Antonio, among the Inupiat of Kotzebue, and the students of the Monday Group in Fort Myers, Fla. Ask students how each story characterizes responsibility—both individual and group.

“I realized that public affairs were also my affairs. I became active in politics because I saw the possibility, if we all sat back and did nothing, of a world in which there would no longer be any stages for actors to act on.”

—Helen Gahagan Douglas