

# QUICK

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## S T A R T S

Here are some exercises to get your students ready to undertake service learning projects.



**Ask the students to name the three civic values named on every U.S. coin.** Have them take out change and examine it, then discuss the meaning of the three mottoes on U.S. coins: *Liberty, E Pluribus Unum*, and *In God We Trust*. Discuss why the government wants these phrases on our coins.



**What do citizens do?** Challenge your students to make a list of as many activities, projects, events, actions as possible that citizens are involved in. Ask for big projects and small, focused on your community and town. If they can't come up with an extensive list, assign them to read the local newspaper for a week and hand in a list of examples of grass-roots citizen action. (Keep the list to inspire them in devising their own projects.)



**Pass out the Bill of Rights and discuss their meaning for American citizens.** Then discuss the meaning of citizenship and challenge the class to come up with a Bill of Responsibilities to match the Bill of Rights.



**Citizens do their homework.** Research is a big part of citizen action. How can we know what to do until we have an accurate idea of how things stand and why? Invite a local activist to speak to the class about what she or he learned along the way and how she or he learned it.



**"Without citizens, democracy is a hollow shell."** Write this quote by Benjamin Barber (director of the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers University) on the board. Ask students to discuss what it means. If there were no citizen activists, what would our neighborhoods, community, nation be like?



**Nobel Prize for citizenship.** Ask students if there were a Nobel Prize for citizenship, who would they nominate? What standards would the prize committee establish? This could be a class discussion, a group activity, or a writing assignment.

*"The only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen."*

– Louis Brandeis

# DEMOCRATIC INSIGHTS



## *The Great Seal of the United States*

It is important for citizens to be aware of the purpose of their nation as it was conceived in the minds of the Founders. The Founders believed that 1776 was a turning point in history and that America would be the leader of a new world order based on the idea that, around the globe, inspired, free individuals would work together to create governments that would really meet their needs.

Many of their ideals are embodied in the Great Seal.

On July 4, 1776, after the Founders signed the Declaration of Independence, they appointed a committee to create a great seal to represent the ideals of the new government that they were going to create.

Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin worked on ideas and symbols for the seal. Benjamin Franklin proposed the turkey for the national bird because of the first Thanksgiving. He was overruled, and the eagle was chosen. The first proposal for a national motto was "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." It was rejected for the "E Pluribus Unum." The official design for the Great Seal of the U.S. was approved by Congress in 1789, but it was not put on the dollar bill until 1935.

The front of the seal features the eagle, an ancient symbol of great vision and spiritual wisdom. The olive branch in the eagle's right talon symbolizes peace. The arrows in the left talon represent the power of war for defense. The fact that the eagle faces the olive branch indicates that the primary aim of the



United States is to maintain peace. The Eagle carries a banner with the national motto, "E Pluribus Unum", which means in Latin, from many into one. This refers to the people and states acting as one. It is the principle of unity and cooperation. The crest over the eagle's head includes a golden glory, with 13 stars in the design of a six pointed star, symbolizing a divine plan for America.

The reverse side of the seal features the pyramid, symbol of stability and the connection between heaven and earth. It also represents the building of a strong government, composed of building blocks of citizens. On the foundation of the structure are the Roman numerals for 1776, representing the revolutionary efforts and principles that were manifest that year. The pyramid is unfinished, indicating that the vision of America could not be completed by that generation. It is a challenge to future generations to contribute to the great work of building a nation based on liberty and unity. At the peak of the pyramid is a golden glory around the "Eye of Providence," symbolizing the divine vision of God guiding the building of this nation. The Latin phrase at the top, "Annuit Coeptis," means God is guiding us. The phrase "Novus Ordo Seclorum" at the bottom means new world order or new order of the ages.



