

By Dave Eggers  
Illustrated by Shawn Harris

978-1-4521-7313-9 • \$17.99 HC  
Ages 5 to 8 • F&P Text Level Gradient: N  
Lexile® Measure: 340L

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Empowering and timeless, *What Can a Citizen Do?* is the latest collaboration from the acclaimed duo behind the bestselling *Her Right Foot*: Dave Eggers and Shawn Harris. This is a book for today's youth about what it means to be a citizen.

Across the course of several seemingly unrelated but ultimately connected actions undertaken by different children, we watch how kids turn a lonely island into a community—and witness them create new frameworks for what the world could be.

This is a book about what citizenship—good citizenship—means to you, and to us all.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Dave Eggers is the author of many books, including *Her Right Foot*, *The Parade*, *The Monk of Mokha*, and *The Circle*. He is the cofounder of: Voice of Witness, an oral-history series focused on human rights; 826 National, a network of writing and tutoring centers; and ScholarMatch, which connects donors and under-resourced students to make college possible; and the International Congress of Youth Voices. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Shawn Harris is an artist and musician who lives and works in Morongo Valley, California. He is the illustrator of *What Can a Citizen Do?* and *Her Right Foot*, both by Dave Eggers, and the upcoming picture book *Everyone's Awake*, by Colin Meloy.



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide consists of activities that can be used when reading, teaching, or discussing *What Can a Citizen Do?* The discussion opportunities and classroom extension activities in this guide are designed to be used in grades K through 12 while the text is read as a whole group, in a small group, or independently. To accommodate this large age range, extension activities are included to add rigor and to allow for adaptation with students across grade levels.

*What Can a Citizen Do?* allows young readers to exercise a range of reading comprehension strategies, from gaining information about a story from the illustrations and text to analyzing character traits, using inferences to make predictions, and more.

Notes throughout the guide correlate the questions and activities with specific standards including the Common Core Anchor Standards and National Standards for Civics and Government. The standards that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1:** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2:** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3:** Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4:** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

**NSS-C.K-4.1:** What is Government?

**NSS-C.5-8.1 and NSS-C.9-12.1:** Civic Life, Politics, and Government

**NSS-C.K-4.2:** Values and Principles of Government

**NSS-C.K-4.3, NSS-C.5-8.3, and NSS-C.9-12.3:** Principles of Democracy

**NSS-C.K-4.5, NSS-C.5-8.5, and NSS-C.9-12.5:** Roles of the Citizen



**VOCABULARY**

These vocabulary words and phrases can be found throughout the book. Use these as a starting point for a word study with *What Can a Citizen Do?* Research shows that discussing vocabulary and phrases within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary.

- Cause
- Neighbor
- Laws
- Right a wrong
- Engaged
- Society
- Latticed
- Lonely
- Soul
- Bind
- Bring in light
- Doubt
- Citizens
- Impact



**Extension activity:** Have students look at the words used in the text and discuss why the specific words or phrases are used. How would using a different word or phrase change the meaning? The mood of the book? The tone of the book?

**ACTIVITIES**

Use these activities to extend student learning with *What Can a Citizen Do?*

**While Reading**

**K-W-L**

- Create a K-W-L chart about citizenship with your students:

<u><b>K</b></u> <b>Know</b>	<u><b>W</b></u> <b>Want to know</b>	<u><b>L</b></u> <b>Learned</b>
What do you know about being a good citizen?	What do you want to learn about citizenship?	What did you learn about citizenship and being a good citizen?
(Fill out before reading)	(Fill out before reading)	(Fill out after reading)

- Before reading, ask students to fill in the first column with what they already know about what it means to be a good citizen. Then ask them to fill in the middle column with what they want to learn about citizenship.
- After reading, have them fill in the final column with what they learned about being a good citizen and about citizenship in general.

## Reading and Interrogating the Text

Throughout the text, the author states reminders and lessons in order to help readers understand what it takes to be a good citizen.

- Discuss each of these questions with your class: What statements does the author provide the reader? What do these statements mean? What does that look like in our lives?

**Example:** “A citizen should be engaged” means that good citizens pay attention to what is going on around them and also to what is happening in far-off places. This could look like reading the news, listening to others, or just paying attention to the world around us and helping when needed.

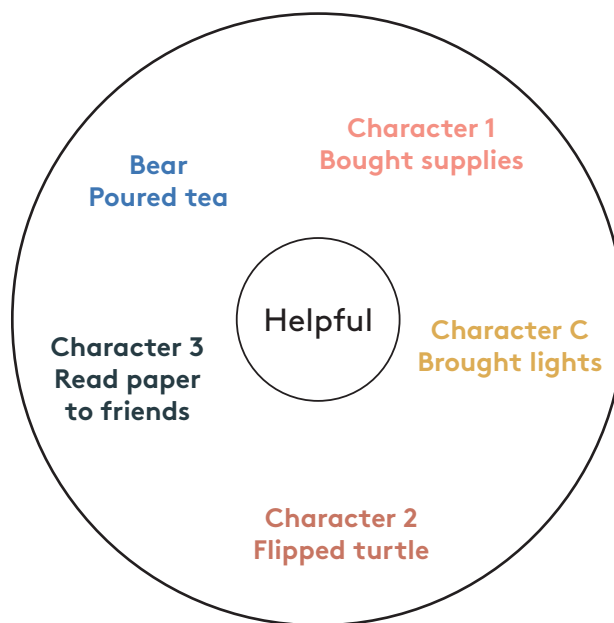
- Using all of these lessons, have your class create a list of what it means to be a good citizen.
- **Extension activity:** Have students brainstorm other traits that may not have been shared in the text.

## Good Citizen Acts: Finding Examples of Citizenship in the Text

Before beginning this activity, have students create names for the book’s unnamed characters using numbers (character 1, 2, 3) or letters (character A, B, C).

- Ask students to think about the specific acts the characters in the story engage in that make them good citizens.
- Have students refer to the traits of good citizenship they brainstormed in the previous activity and write each one on a different circle. Then, using the predetermined labeling system, ask students to indicate on each circle the character(s) that showed that trait and how they showed it. It may also help to use color coding for each character.

**Example:**










**Identifying Symbolism**

Explain to the class how Eggers’s story of nine kids and a bear extends to the world when we think of the book as a symbol of our society. Discuss the symbolism in the book using the following questions:

- What do you notice about the characters who are portrayed in the book? Do they look different, or do any of them look the same? (If a student points out the spread that features the twins, you may follow up by asking what it means to have them on the page with the words, “none of us the same.”)
- A bear cannot actually be a citizen of our society, so what does the bear symbolize?
- What about the neighbor—what might he symbolize?
- If the kids symbolize all types of citizens, what do you think the treehouse at the end of the book symbolizes?

Create the following chart for your class and have students fill in the meanings and explanations for each symbol:

Symbol	Meaning	Explanation
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

- **Extension activity:** Ask students to choose a citizen in the book that best symbolizes them, and have them share and explain their selection with the class.

### After Reading

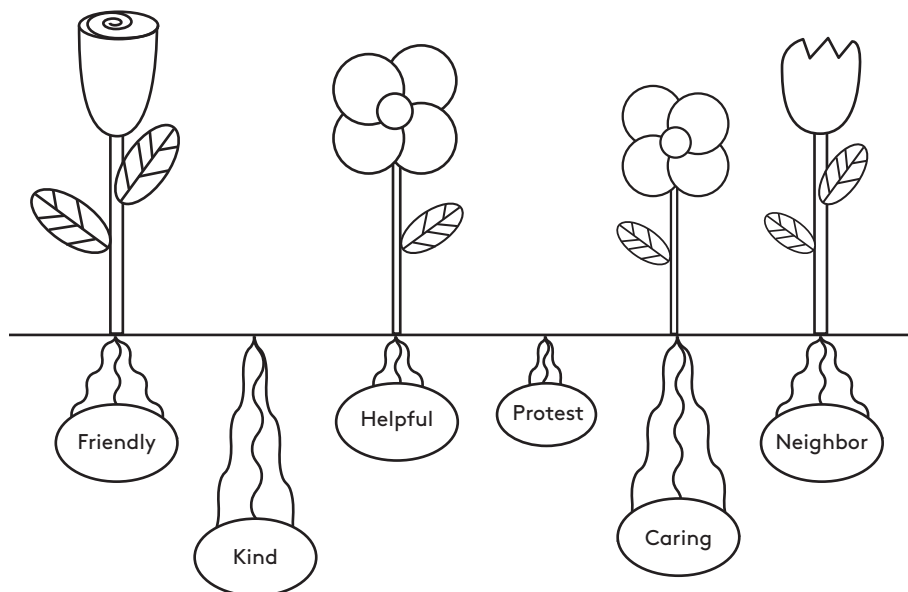
#### Growing Into Good Citizens

Tell your students to think of society as a garden, and explain that we need good seeds to help our garden grow. Ask them what they can do to be good citizens.

- As a class, create a garden bulletin board and have students label each seed with a good citizenship trait (depending on grade level, these can be simple like “friendly” or more complex like “doesn’t judge others based on their looks”).

For example:

Good citizens grow a beautiful garden



#### Finding Citizenship Everywhere: Fictional Characters Displaying Good Citizenship

- Explain to students how characters in other books can be good citizens, even when the book isn’t specifically about citizenship or being a member of a society.
  - Show students other books featuring characters who embody what it means to be a good citizen. Create a circle map or character web sharing how the character has good citizenship traits.
- Using all of these lessons, have your class create a list of what it means to be a good citizen.
- **Extension activity:** Ask students to find a book that they believe features a character who is a good citizen. Have them write a paragraph stating how the character is a good citizen.

### Real Life Examples: Kids Can Save the World

- Kids can save the world! Use the book as a starting point by asking your students how the characters could be thought of as “saving the world.” Have your students research a contemporary or historical child who has changed the world.

**Examples:** Malala Yousafzai, Jack Andraka, Louis Braille, Mari Copeny, Megan Markle, Claudette Colvin, Jazz Jennings, Philo Fransworth

- Have students answer the following questions in their research:
  - Who are they?
  - What did they do?
  - Why are they important?
  - When did they live?/When were they born?
  - Where did/do they live?
  - How did they change the world?/How did they embody good citizenship traits?
- Using this information, have your students write a paragraph or paper about their assigned person, describing the ways he or she is a good citizen.
- **Extension activity:** Have students create an Animoto, iMovie, Adobe Spark, or other video highlighting what they learned about their assigned person to share with the whole class. Have students take notes as they watch the videos listing the good citizenship traits each person exhibits.
- **Extension activity:** Have your students write the paragraph in first person, then turn your classroom into a living wax museum. Each student will pretend to be their research subject and will make a small display about them. Then they will stand next to their display until someone comes by and hits their “become alive” button, at which point they “animate” and say one or two sentences about their subject.
  - Make sure to split these presentations into three different times or days in order to allow a third of your class to walk the wax museum while the rest of the class presents.



### Creating Collages Inspired by Shawn Harris's Illustration

- Shawn Harris uses a very unique collage style which includes sketching out a scene, creating the pieces of the scene from construction paper, putting the scene together, then adding ink or paint on the top to add details.
  - Resources:**
    - Chronicle Book *What Can a Citizen Do?* book trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzfk5xib-DU>
    - Chronicle Books *Her Right Foot* book trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9qw1Xyby30>
    - Shawn Harris YouTube video series: "shawnharrisinfo" on YouTube
- Extension activity:** Have your students create their own Shawn Harris-esque collages using the same technique.
  - Have them experiment with different techniques including:**
    - Gluing down the pieces vs. not gluing to see how it changes the dimensional experience
    - Creating the collage on a small scale vs. a big scale to see how it affects the overall effect of the scene

### Entry into Discussion: Citizenship as Identity

- We are not only citizens of our country, but citizens of our home, school, workplace, team, etc.
- Have students create a list of all of the groups they are citizens of.
- Individually, in pairs, or in groups, have students come up with the obligations of a good citizen in each of the organizations they are part of.





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as whole class discussions, reading check-ins, or as writing prompts with *What Can a Citizen Do?*

1. How do the illustrations add to the story? Take a spread and read only the text out loud. How does the meaning of the words change when the illustrations are added? This can be repeated for any spread/page.
2. How does changing the sign from NO TRUMPETS to OK TRUMPETS show the acceptance of the characters? What can this be compared to in our society?
3. How did the characters help the new neighbor feel welcome? Think of cause and effect: how could the characters have acted differently, and how might the outcome have changed if they had?
4. The author used rhyming throughout the book. What rhyming words can you find? Do you see a pattern in the rhyming?
5. The book mentions joys and pains within a society. Why would the author feel that it is necessary to point out that citizens must keep going even during painful times? What times in history might the author be referring to?
6. Why should civics be (or not be) a required course? At what age should civics be taught?  
**Option:** As a class, create a brainstorming map for all the reasons why civics is important.
7. How does the bear change from its introduction to its last appearance? What does this tell the reader about the bear and what it symbolizes?

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school reading coach and teacher from Orlando, Florida. Kellee is the co-author of the blog *Unleashing Readers*; the author of various teaching guides; a member of the 2016–2018 ALAN Board of Directors; a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA; and the chair of the 2014 Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee. Kellee can be reached at [Kellee.Moyer@gmail.com](mailto:Kellee.Moyer@gmail.com). Kellee was assisted with some of the civics activities by Theresa Maluchnik, a seventh grade civics teacher from Orlando, Florida.

