

Citizenship: Just the Facts

Name: _____

Already a U.S. Citizen?

Citizenship means being a member of a country and having full rights and responsibilities under that country's law. Some people are born a United States citizen. People who are born in the United States are automatically citizens at birth. So are people born outside the U.S. to parents who are both citizens. The rules can get a bit complicated for people born outside the U.S. who have only one citizen parent, but generally they are also citizens at birth.



Born in the USA



Citizen Parents



Naturalized

Becoming a U.S. Citizen

What if you weren't born in the U.S. and neither of your parents are U.S. citizens? You can still become a citizen through a process called **naturalization**. To qualify, applicants must be at least 18 years old and have been permanent residents of the United States for 5 years. (There is one shortcut: People who serve in the U.S. military for at least one year can become citizens sooner because they have demonstrated their commitment to the United States.) Applicants must also have good character, speak English, and pass a civics test and an interview. As a final step, they must take an **Oath of Allegiance** swearing loyalty to the United States and our Constitution.

Allegiance: Citizens Owe It

People who go through the naturalization process aren't the only ones who must be loyal to the United States. *All* U.S. citizens owe allegiance to our country. **Treason** is the act of betraying your country, and the U.S. Constitution makes this crime punishable by death! People who were born citizens may not think about allegiance as much as those preparing to take the Oath, but you can probably remember a time when you've said this word... Maybe even this morning! Americans often say the **Pledge of Allegiance** to show loyalty to the United States flag and the nation it stands for.



The U.S. flag has one stripe for each of the 13 original states and one star for each current state. Right now there are 50 stars.

Love of Country



Each Memorial Day, Americans in towns across the nation line up to watch local parades honoring those who have died.
Source: Department of Defense

Beyond owing allegiance to the United States, most U.S. citizens feel a deep bond with their country. We call this feeling patriotism. Many citizens get emotional when they hear the national anthem, which is called **The Star Spangled Banner**. Every July 4th, Americans celebrate **Independence Day**—the day the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, when the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. Other national holidays, such as **Presidents' Day** and **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**, honor the lives and sacrifices of important Americans. **Memorial Day** and **Veterans Day** are two national holidays honoring those who lost their lives or served in the U.S. military, and they can be very emotional days for many U.S. citizens.