

Preparing for Permanent Residency and Citizenship

Some participants in adult ESL and family literacy programs are working to become permanent U.S. residents or citizens. This section gives information about these processes and resources for teachers to consult.

Lawful Permanent Residency (Green Card)

In order to be able to legally live and work permanently in the United States, individuals must go through a multi-step process to become legal immigrants. Teachers should become acquainted with the immigration and citizenship processes themselves, so they can help the adult English language learners in their programs understand when, where, and how they may begin this process in their own communities. In order to keep up to date on information concerning the process and to obtain the current information and forms, teachers can periodically check the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Web site at www.uscis.gov and the RapidImmigration.com Web site at www.rapidimmigration.com/usa/1_eng_immigration_info.html.

It is important to distinguish between the educational and legal aspects of citizenship preparation (Nixon & Keenan, 1997). *The teacher's role is to direct learners to information (e.g., print, Web, telephone) and local sources of assistance, not to assist the learners in the naturalization process itself. This is particularly true in dealing with immigration issues, but also with other legal issues.*

U.S. Citizenship

The process of obtaining U.S. citizenship is called naturalization. Teachers can help students understand the responsibilities that naturalization brings, along with the many rights and privileges they will receive as a result of becoming citizens. In becoming U.S. citizens, individuals promise to support and defend the Constitution and the laws of the United States, swear allegiance to the United States, and promise to serve the country when required. In most cases, they must give up prior allegiances to other countries. U.S. citizenship brings the right to vote and hold public office, work for the federal government, and help family members immigrate to the United States.

Although the citizenship process and exam are being revised, three resources on the Internet will help teachers and students understand the application process for citizenship. These resources help explain to teachers and applicants how to prepare for the exam. The first source, USCIS, within the Department of Homeland Security, is the government agency that administers the naturalization process. Information about USCIS is available on their Web site at www.uscis.gov. The second Internet resource is for literacy staff and volunteers: A free online course, *Citizenship: What Volunteers Need to Know* (Proliteracy Worldwide & National Center for Family Literacy, 2004), at Thinkfinity (www.thinkfinity.org), offers a

45-minute step-by-step tour through the naturalization process, using the USCIS Web site as its base. The third resource is the National Center for ESL Literacy Education's (NCLE) two-page brief, *Citizenship Preparation for Adult ESL Learners*, available at www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/citizen.html (Nixon & Keenan, 1997). This document provides the basis for the activities that follow this summary. Teachers may use these activities to help students prepare for the citizenship exam, but they should be aware that adult immigrants need skills beyond basic English proficiency to successfully complete the process.

The first step in the naturalization process is to determine if an individual is eligible for citizenship. (See eligibility requirements on the USCIS Web site at www.uscis.gov.) Students will need to gather their documents, have two photographs taken, and be prepared to pay the appropriate fees. They may download the Forms and Fees document from the USCIS Web site. They will need to gather the following documents-- their Social Security card; their U.S. Residency card and a list of their residences for the past 5 years; their work or school history; a list of trips outside the United States of 24 hours or more; information on their spouse, including their spouse's Social Security number, date of birth, and date of citizenship; date of marriage to their spouse and information on prior marriages; information on their children, including the dates and countries of their birth, their current address, school and work affiliations, and arrest history.

If the individuals are determined eligible, they can apply for citizenship. When applicants have sent in their completed application and fees, they will receive an appointment letter from USCIS. They will need to get their fingerprints taken, wait for their scheduled interview and go to the local office at the specified time, and take the English and civics tests. After passing the tests, they are ready for the final step.

The final step to receiving citizenship is to take the oath of allegiance. Applicants will check in at their assigned location for the naturalization ceremony. There, they turn in their Permanent Resident Card, answer any further questions, take the oath, and receive their Certificate of Naturalization.

The USCIS is in the process of redesigning the citizenship test. The new test should be implemented in fall 2008.

Conclusion

In order to have access to the full range of U.S. government sponsored services, adult English language learners need to consider becoming U.S. citizens. Keeping in mind that they are *not* immigration specialists or legal advisors, ESL instructors can play an important role by helping learners achieve the English language competency and obtain the content knowledge they need to pass the citizenship exam.

Activities for Teaching Citizenship

Using a variety of materials in the citizenship class provides relevant content and practice with English for learners, especially those with minimal English literacy skills (Holt, 1995). Textbooks do exist; however, most citizenship preparation texts on the market are not written at a level suitable for beginning-level learners (Silliman, 1997). Instructors will need to adapt materials for these learners (Nixon & Keenan, 1997). Both learners and teachers need to understand that if learners have very limited English proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking, they may have difficulty successfully completing the English and civics tests.

Regardless of the learner's English proficiency and literacy level, classroom instruction must not be limited to textbook work. The use of authentic materials is recommended for all learners. An American flag; historical or civics posters; and images of the White House, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Martin Luther King are examples of visual aids that can help literacy-level learners better understand the content.

Following are some activities that can be done in class. Most are based on the USCIS list of 100 questions, from which the majority of USCIS interview questions are drawn. Some examples for extending the activities to the other components of family literacy are provided for each. See Part III, beginning on page III–1 for a review of the four family literacy components:

- Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children (PACT Time)
- Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children (Parent Education)
- Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency (Adult Education)
- An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (Children's Education)

Figure IV–8: Citizenship Preparation Activities

Question by Theme. To prepare for this activity, the teacher needs to arrange the 100 USCIS questions according to theme. Although most of the questions fit neatly into such themes as the presidency, the Congress, or the Constitution, some questions will fit into more than one theme. By breaking up the questions in this manner, the teacher is able to discuss questions in clear thematic units. In family literacy programs, these themes may be carried through to the other components. For example, the children's classroom may use activities from children's books that address the same themes; a parent education session activity with parents and children might include a field trip to local government agencies, such as the courthouse, post office, and library; and during parent time, discussions might include laws on child abuse and domestic violence in this country.

Contests. Many learners enjoy competition. This is particularly true for those whose home country educational system emphasizes memorization, speed, and individual achievement. To set up a contest, the teacher divides the class into teams. The teacher may ask the questions, have a learner ask the questions, or have the teams choose and ask the questions. One individual answers questions until a mistake is made, at which time a person from the other team begins answering questions. The winner is the one who answers the most questions before making a mistake.

Tape Recording. Since it is unlikely that the USCIS interviewer will sound exactly the same as the teacher, learners should have opportunities to hear the questions asked by other native speakers of English, for example, the teacher's friends or family members. It is important to provide opportunities to hear a variety of accents and intonations. Alternatively, learners may collect their own samples from friends, neighbors, or coworkers who speak English. This gives learners the opportunity to speak to native speakers of English. A third option is to ask the learners themselves to read and record the questions. Although this takes a great deal of time, it fosters test familiarity.

Flash Cards. Learners can make a set of 100 question flashcards for themselves and write the answers on the back. Although this takes a lot of class time, it allows learners to study the questions outside of class. In family literacy programs, parents can also create a small set of flash cards (5-10 cards) for their children, created from digital photos taken of their children's favorite places they have visited on the field trip (see *Question Division* above). At home, parents can discuss what they see in the photo with their children, thus expanding their children's vocabulary.

Dictation. Since the test requires that learners listen to and write down one or two sentences, practicing dictation is vital. Many learners are more afraid of this particular part of the test than of any other part of the interview. Following are possible practice formats: a) The teacher dictates questions or answers for the learners to write. b) The teacher dictates the questions, and the learners write down the answers. c) The teacher dictates the answers, and the learners write the corresponding questions. d) In family literacy programs, parents can write down what their children say as the children describe their artwork or short stories.

Role Play. The class pretends that the teacher is the USCIS examiner. The teacher creates an environment in the classroom that is similar to the testing situation, including such props as the American flag and photographs of the President. Then the teacher and individual students perform practice interviews. Learners can also take both sides of the role play: One student is the examiner, and one student is the examinee. This is particularly effective in multilevel classes, where a more proficient learner can practice language skills while helping a learner with less language proficiency or content knowledge.

Drill Patterns. Drill and practice can be a valuable technique for memorizing answers for the exam. Following are some possible drills: a) The teacher recites a question, and the learners repeat it. b) The teacher recites a question, and the learners give the answer. c) The teacher recites the answer, and the learners recite the question. If necessary, the teacher can break down the sentences into meaningful chunks that can be used for further practice. Pronunciation drills may be added as well. A drill that provides practice with rephrasing the question is also useful, as the USCIS examiner may do so during the interview.

Cloze Exercises. The teacher develops worksheets with some text deleted. Possible high-level texts are the *Star-Spangled Banner*, the *Pledge of Allegiance*, or the Preamble to the Constitution. The teacher may also ask learners to read a passage from a history book aloud or recite one from memory. Then the teacher writes the passage on the board and erases every fifth word. The class then reads the passage, filling in the missing words. In family literacy programs, parents and children can learn to recite the *Pledge of Allegiance* and sing the *Star-Spangled Banner*, *This Land is Your Land*, or *America, the Beautiful* for President's Day or the Fourth of July.

Testing Practice. Learners may need instruction in the process of signing up for the test and taking the written test. This could include a field trip to the local USCIS office. Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to practice test-taking skills, making sure that learners know how to take multiple choice tests (Silliman 1997). Practice versions of the standardized tests are available from several publishers.

(Adapted from Nixon & Keenan, 1997. Used with permission.)

Additional Resources

Cultural Orientation Resource Center. The *Culture Profiles* series, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, is available at www.cal.org/co/publications/profiles.html. *Culture Profiles* provide concise, informative introductions to the cultural background of refugee populations. Profiles available online include *Muslim Refugees*, *Somali Bantu*, *The Afghans*, *The Iraqis*, *The Haitians*, and *The Bosnians*.

EL Civics “How to” Manual. Bronx Community College English Literacy and Civic Understanding Demonstration Grant (funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education). (www.bcc.cuny.edu/ELCivics/index.cfm)

Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants was published by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education to facilitate the adjustment of new immigrants to life in America. A lawful permanent resident can use the guide to find out about their rights and responsibilities as a new immigrant; understand how our federal, state, and local governments work; and learn about important historical events that have shaped the United States. The guide includes basic information on civic principles, as well as practical information, such as how to obtain a Social Security Number, how to get help in preparing your taxes, and how to enroll your child in school. It also provides resources that are available to help immigrants get the essential services they need. (www.uscis.gov)

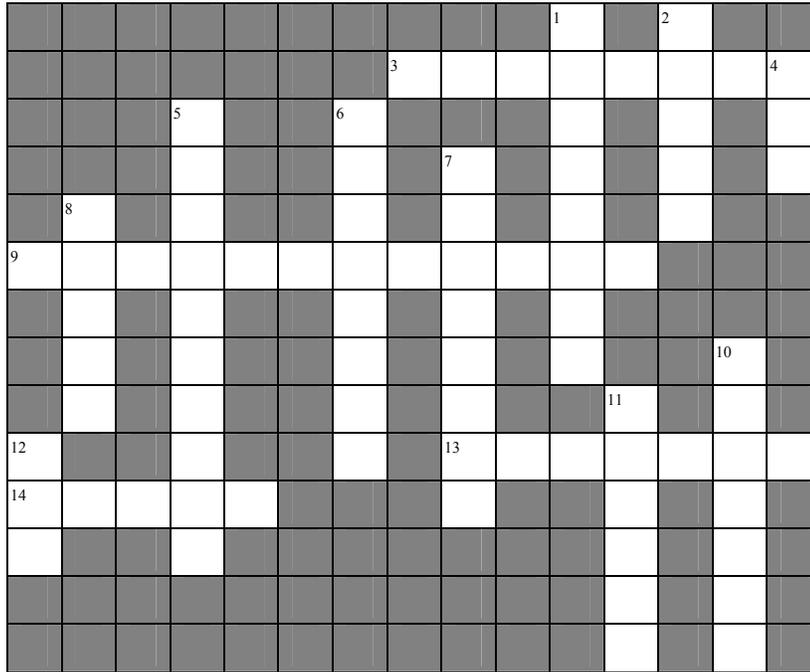
EL/Civics Online is a series of online courses to help teachers create interesting, effective lessons on U.S. history, government, civic engagement, and the naturalization process. (www.elcivicsonline.org)

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Citizenship Crossword Puzzle

The following puzzle questions are taken directly from the Sample Civics Questions from *A Guide to Naturalization* (USCIS, 2004). These are examples of questions a USCIS officer may ask during a citizenship interview. The sentences are also examples of the types of sentences a USCIS officer may ask an applicant to read aloud or write during the interview. These are examples only.



Puzzle Clues

- Across**
- 3. What were the 13 original states of the United States called before they were states?
 - 9. What holiday was celebrated for the first time by American colonists?
 - 13. Independence Day celebrates independence from whom?
 - 14. What color are the stars on our flag?
- Down**
- 1. What is the head executive of a state government called?
 - 2. How many stars are there on our flag?
 - 4. How many years is a Senator’s term?
 - 5. What do we call changes to the Constitution?
 - 6. What is the legislative branch of our government?
 - 7. In what month is the new President elected?
 - 8. How many branches are there in the United States government?
 - 10. In what month is the new President inaugurated?
 - 11. What was the 49th state added to our Union (the United States)?
 - 12. For how many years is one term for a member of the House of Representatives?

