



LESSON  
**24**

## How can citizens promote the common good?

### LESSON PURPOSE

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In this lesson, you will examine some responsibilities that we all have to promote the common good. We will also look at ways we can participate in making decisions about protecting our rights and the common good.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

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When you have finished this lesson, you should be able to

- explain the importance of promoting the common good,
- explain why it is sometimes difficult to agree upon what is the common good, and
- explain why education is important in preparing citizens to participate in their government and the reasons why they should participate.



*How can people your age contribute to the common good?*

## **How do we decide what is best for everyone?**

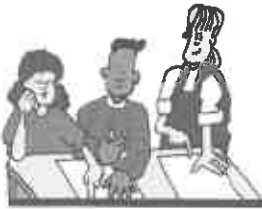
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When you studied the ideas of natural rights, you learned that the purpose of government is to protect our rights to life, liberty, and property. When we choose a government that promises to protect these rights, we protect our self-interest. We want to make sure that government fulfills its duties to us as individuals.

When you studied the ideas of republican government, you learned that the government and its citizens have a duty to serve the common good. Each citizen works cooperatively with the government and each other for the good of the whole community. In some situations, this might mean that we should put aside our own self-interest for the common good.

In some situations, the common good is quite clear. For example, it is good for all of us to live in a healthy environment. Our country needs to be protected by our armed forces. In other situations, citizens might disagree about the common good. For example, people disagree about whether it is good for everyone to begin each school day with a prayer.

Some people might also disagree about how to serve the common good. We know that protecting the environment serves the common good. But, some ways of protecting the environment might endanger people's jobs and violate property rights. Sometimes it is difficult to decide between our self-interest and the common good.



## Critical Thinking Exercise

### How Should the Town Council Vote?

Suppose the town council calls for a public hearing to seek opinions and advice from the people living and working in Smallville, USA. The council has arranged a public hearing on Monday at seven o'clock. They have invited the people who live and work in the town to attend the hearing. They are hoping for a good turnout. The town council wants to get some good ideas that might help to solve the town's problem.

#### Getting Ready for the Public Hearing

Read the facts about the problem in Smallville. Prepare to play the role of one of the groups described after the story. Each group should prepare a presentation to make at the public hearing. The town council will ask your opinion about solving the problem.

#### Problems in Smallville, USA

Imagine that you live in a small community. Most of the people in Smallville work in one large factory. The smoke from the factory pollutes the air and is a danger to everyone's health. The smoke also pollutes the air of communities nearby.

It would be very expensive to stop the pollution. The owners of the factory say they cannot afford to buy the

machinery needed to stop pollution. They would lose money and might not be able to stay in business. If the factory closed, the owners say that many people would lose their jobs. There are no other good jobs available nearby, and many people would be without a job.

The town council is looking for ways to solve the problem and is hoping that the public hearing will help them to make a decision on how to solve the town's problem with pollution. The town council is supposed to protect the people's rights. It is also supposed to support the common good.

#### Group 1: The Town Council Members

The town council must find a way to rid the town of air pollution that is harming the health of the people living in town and in communities nearby. The council does not want the factory to close and cause most of the town residents to lose their jobs. The council wants to speak with groups that have valuable information about the situation. The town council must consider the following:

- 1 What might be some self-interests of the people who live in the community?



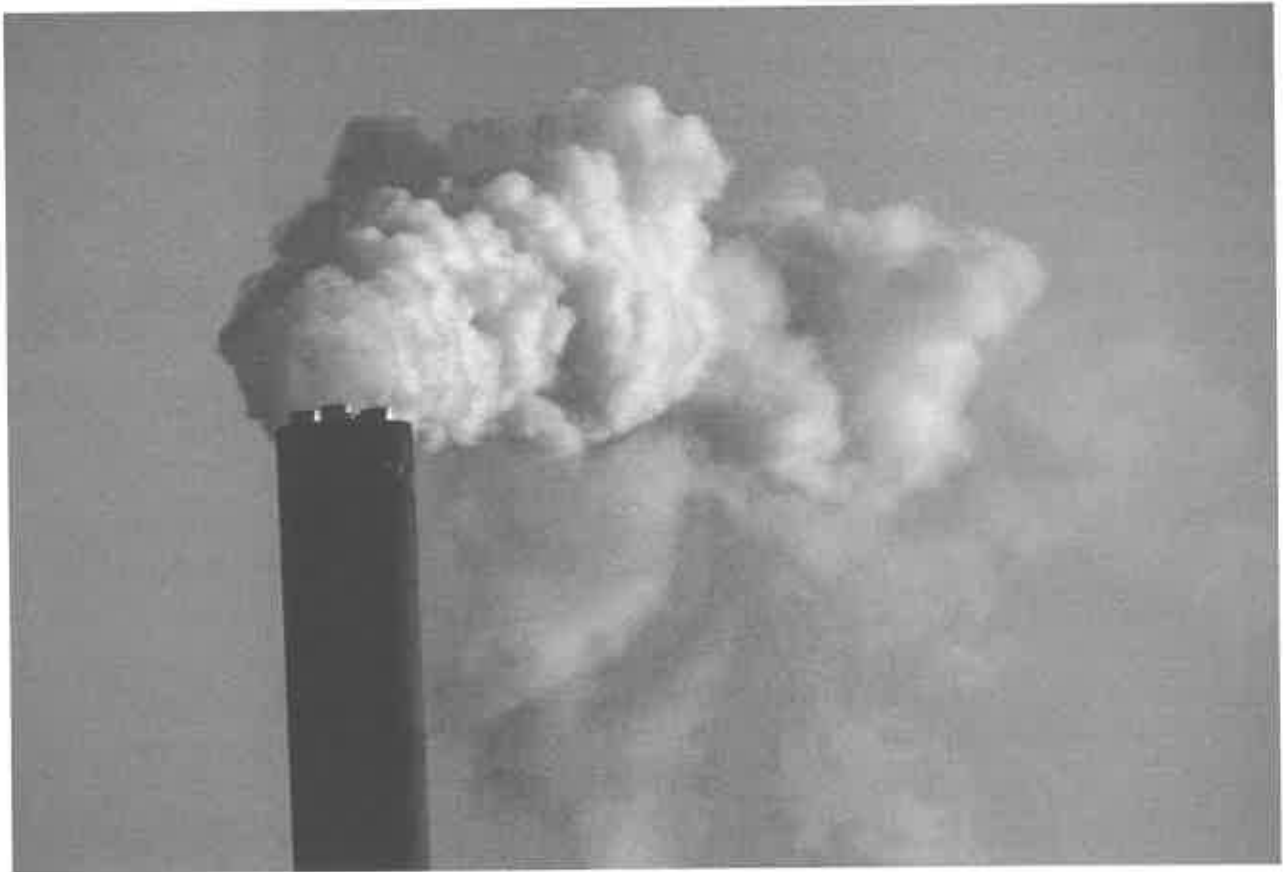
## Critical Thinking Exercise

- 2 Are there individual rights that should be considered?
- 3 What might be the common good of the community?
- 4 To make a good and fair decision, what issues does the town council have to consider?
- 5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of each solution suggested?

After the hearing, the town council will make a decision.

### **Group 2: Owners of the Factory**

You earn a living from the factory, and you employ many workers who also earn their living from the factory. If the town council requires you to install expensive machinery onto the smokestacks of your factory, you would not be able to afford the cost and have to close the factory.



*What are some rights and responsibilities of citizens in a free society?*

### **Group 3: Employees of the Factory**

You have worked in the factory for many years. Your father and your grandfather worked in this factory. You do not want to lose your job because you realize there are no other good jobs in Smallville.

### **Group 4: Citizens for Better Health**

You think that pollution is a direct cause of serious health problems in your town. You want machinery installed to limit the amount of smoke the factory can produce.

### **Group 5: Citizens for a Pollution-free Environment**

You believe that pollution is damaging animal habitats and harming trees and other plants in nearby wooded areas. You believe that environmental agencies should be contacted to give advice.

### **Taking Part in the Public Hearing**

- 1 The president of the town council will start the meeting.
- 2 Each group has four minutes to explain its position to the council.
- 3 After each presentation, the council member may ask questions of the group for two minutes. Each person in the group should help answer the questions.

- 4 After hearing all the groups, the town council will meet and decide what to do.

### **Talking It Over**

- 1 Do you agree with the town council's decision?
- 2 Why might citizens disagree about which opinion is most important for the town?
- 3 Are there any ways to solve the problem other than those discussed in the hearing?
- 4 Did you change your opinion after listening to all of the groups? If you did, which argument convinced you?





*What are some ways that you can participate in our government?*

## **How can you participate in your government?**

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Our government is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. You are a part of the people. We, the people, run our government. We elect people to work for us in our government.

We need to be sure they do a good job. If they do, we will vote for them again. If they do not, we may want to vote for others to take their place. We participate in government to protect our rights and to promote the common good.

You cannot vote until you are eighteen. However, you can still participate in our government. One of the most important things you can do is something you have already started to do. You can learn something about our government. You can learn what it is supposed to do. You can learn how it works. You can learn what rights you have. Finally, you can think about what responsibilities you should carry out.

Thomas Jefferson and other important Founders thought that all people should have an opportunity to get an education. They thought the main purpose of education should be to prepare you to become a thoughtful and responsible citizen. They knew our government could only work well if the people are well educated. Jefferson said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, ... it expects what never was and what never will be."

You can also participate by keeping informed about what your government

is doing. You can keep informed by reading newspapers, magazines, and responsible websites. You can listen to the news on the radio and watch it on television. You can discuss the actions of government with your parents and friends. You can protect your rights and the rights of others. If there is a law or problem you feel strongly about, you can express your opinion. You can tell your friends, and you can write to members of your government.

You can participate by volunteering to help people in your community. You can participate by taking part in the government of your classroom and your school. You can start now to be an informed and effective citizen.

## What responsibilities will you fulfill?

You have learned a great deal about our nation's government. You have learned about the government's responsibilities and your rights. You have also discussed some of the responsibilities of citizens.

You have inherited a free society. It is your society. You are free to make many choices. You are free to choose what kind of citizen you want to be. You can help keep your society free. You can help make sure all people's rights are protected. You can help promote our common good. We hope that this book helps you make wise decisions about what kind of citizen you want to be.



*What are some rights and responsibilities of citizens in a free society?*

# Reviewing and Using the Lesson

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- 1 How can schools help students become good citizens?
- 2 What are some ways you can participate in your government now?
- 3 Does a good citizen have a responsibility to try to improve the lives of people who need help? Why or why not?
- 4 What responsibilities should a citizen take to protect or promote the welfare of people in other countries? Explain your position.
- 5 Why is it necessary that a citizen balance his or her self-interest with the common good?

## Activities

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- 1 Make a list of things you can do for your community. Put these things in two columns. At the top of one column write Political Actions, and at the top of the other write Social Actions. Explain to your class the difference between these two kinds of community responsibilities.
- 2 Go to your library or use the internet to research the life of someone from your city, state, or tribal reservation who put the common good before his or her own self-interest. Write a short report to present to your class.
- 3 Make a poster that shows how students in your grade, but in another state or country, are engaged in good citizenship.