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Lessons in Civics

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Lessons in Civics



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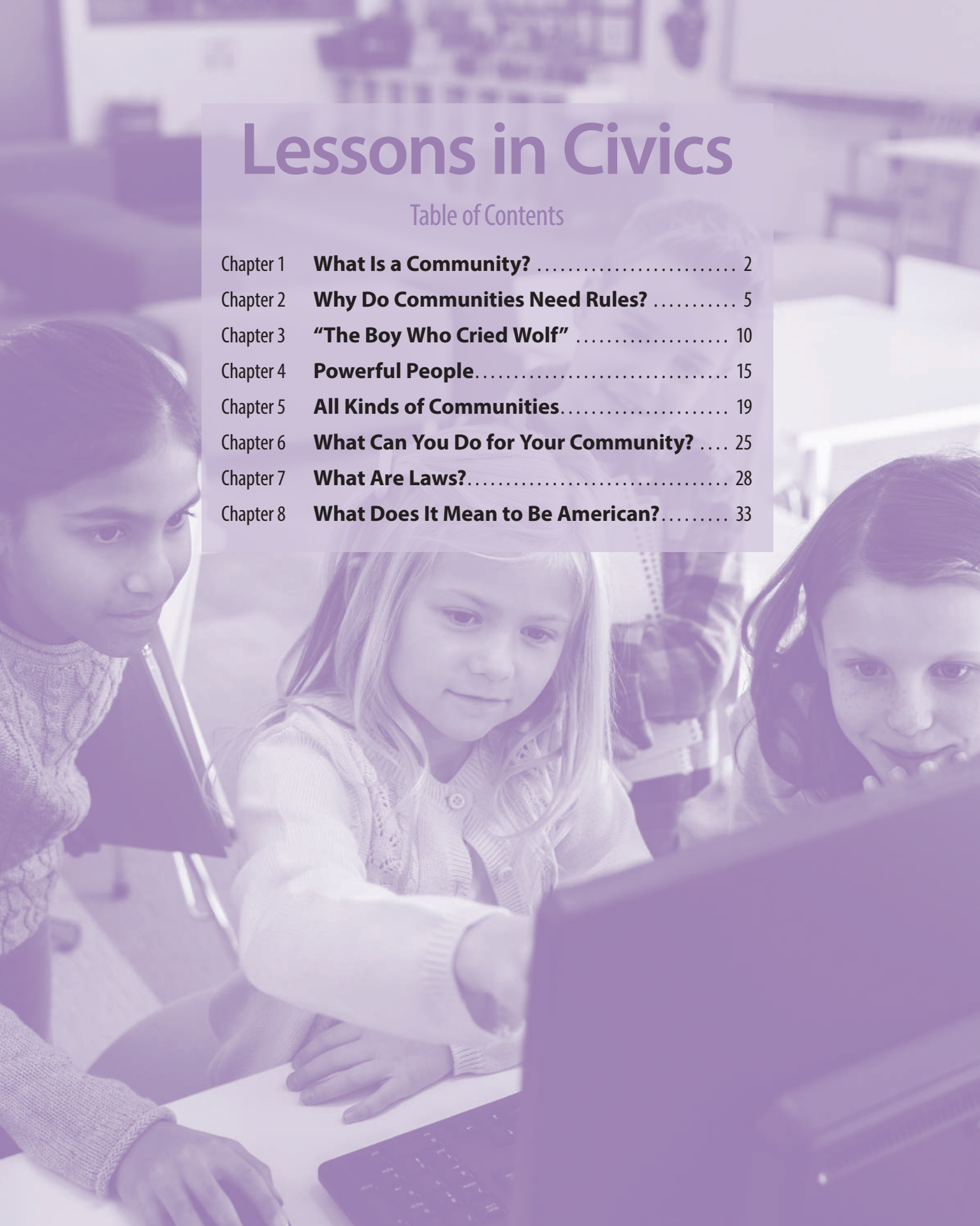
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Lessons in Civics

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What Is a Community?

A community is a group of people who share something. The people who live in a community are its members. They might live in the same neighborhood or go to the same school.

A community can be big or small. Families, classrooms, cities, and countries are all examples of communities. People in communities live, work, and play together.



Imagine if everyone lived all by themselves. We would each have to grow our own food. We would have to do everything by ourselves. It would be much harder to survive. We would also probably feel very lonely.



That's why people live in communities. In a community, we help each other by working together. We also keep each other company. Living in a community helps people feel like they are a part of something larger than themselves.





Often, communities form because of a shared interest. Some people form clubs because they love music or books, for example. Or they may play the same sport or have the same hobby. Being a member of a church, synagogue, or temple is being part of a community, too.



Why Do Communities Need Rules?

Rules are guides for how to act in a community. Rules tell us things we can and can't do. They also tell us how we should do things.

Rules help everyone stay safe. For example, playground rules help prevent accidents. Adults follow safety rules, too. Important rules about driving keep everyone safe. Two examples of driving safety rules are stopping at a stop sign and using your blinker to tell others that you are turning.

Rules also help keep things fair. When we play games, rules make sure everyone has a fair chance.



Different places have different rules. Have you ever wondered how a community decides its rules? In a community like a city, people choose others to make the rules, called laws.

In most classrooms, the teacher makes the rules. For example, you may have rules about listening when the teacher is talking. You may need to raise your hand to talk. These rules help us learn. They also help us be respectful of others.



Here are some rules we should follow every day, no matter where we are:

1. Share and take turns. This is an important part of working together. Taking turns gives everyone a chance to join in.
2. Play fair and be respectful. It feels good to win. But it's important to play by the rules. Playing fair shows that we are thinking about others. We also show respect for others by being a good sport. A good sport is someone who is polite and caring even when they lose.



3. Respect others at all times. Everyone has the right to be themselves and to be treated with respect.
4. Tell the truth. Truth is important in a community. Being honest helps us trust each other.
5. Disagree respectfully. Sometimes we disagree with others. We may even disagree with a rule. If you disagree, you can say that in a respectful way. You can ask questions and suggest changes.



Different people have the job of making sure everyone follows the rules. In a classroom, those people are teachers and other classroom helpers. At home, these people are the adults we live with. It's important to have someone who makes sure rules are followed.



“The Boy Who Cried Wolf”

The story of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” is a fable. That means it’s a story that teaches a lesson about right and wrong. This fable shows one reason why it’s important to tell the truth.

One day, a shepherd boy was on a hillside watching his flock. He was bored. He had no one to talk to. The sheep were just quietly eating grass.



To entertain himself, he shouted, "Wolf! Wolf! A wolf is chasing the sheep!"

The people from his village came running to help protect the flock. But when they got to the shepherd boy, they didn't see a wolf. They were very angry with the boy. But he just laughed. "Don't cry 'wolf,'" they said, "when there's no wolf!" They went back down the hill, grumbling all the way.



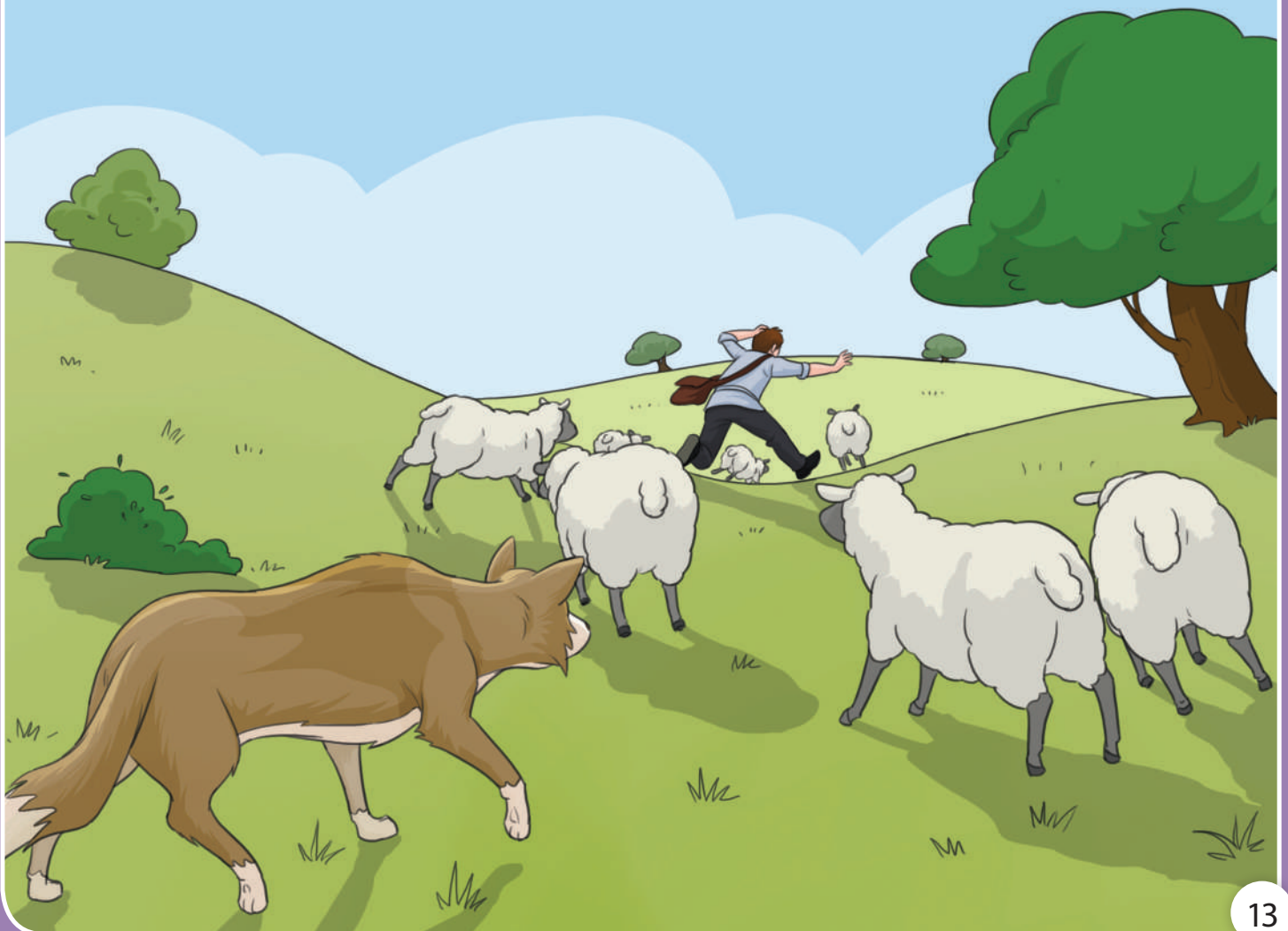
Later, the boy was bored again. He found it so funny last time when the villagers came running up the hill. So he cried again, "Wolf! A wolf is chasing the sheep!"

Again, the villagers ran up the hill. When they saw nothing, they shouted at him, "Save it for when there's something really wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is *no* wolf!"

The boy thought their red faces were even funnier than last time.



The next day, the boy was ready to repeat his trick. But then he saw an actual wolf sneaking up on the flock. The boy ran off as fast as he could to get help. As he ran, he shouted, "Wolf! Wolf!" The villagers thought he was trying to trick them again. And so they stayed in their houses.



At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with the sheep. They went up the hill to see what happened. They found him crying with his head in his hands.

"There really was a wolf! The flock ran away! I cried, 'Wolf!' Why didn't you come?"

The villagers shook their heads.

"We'll help you look for the lost sheep tomorrow," one of them said. "But I think you've learned something today. Nobody believes a liar . . . even when he is telling the truth!"



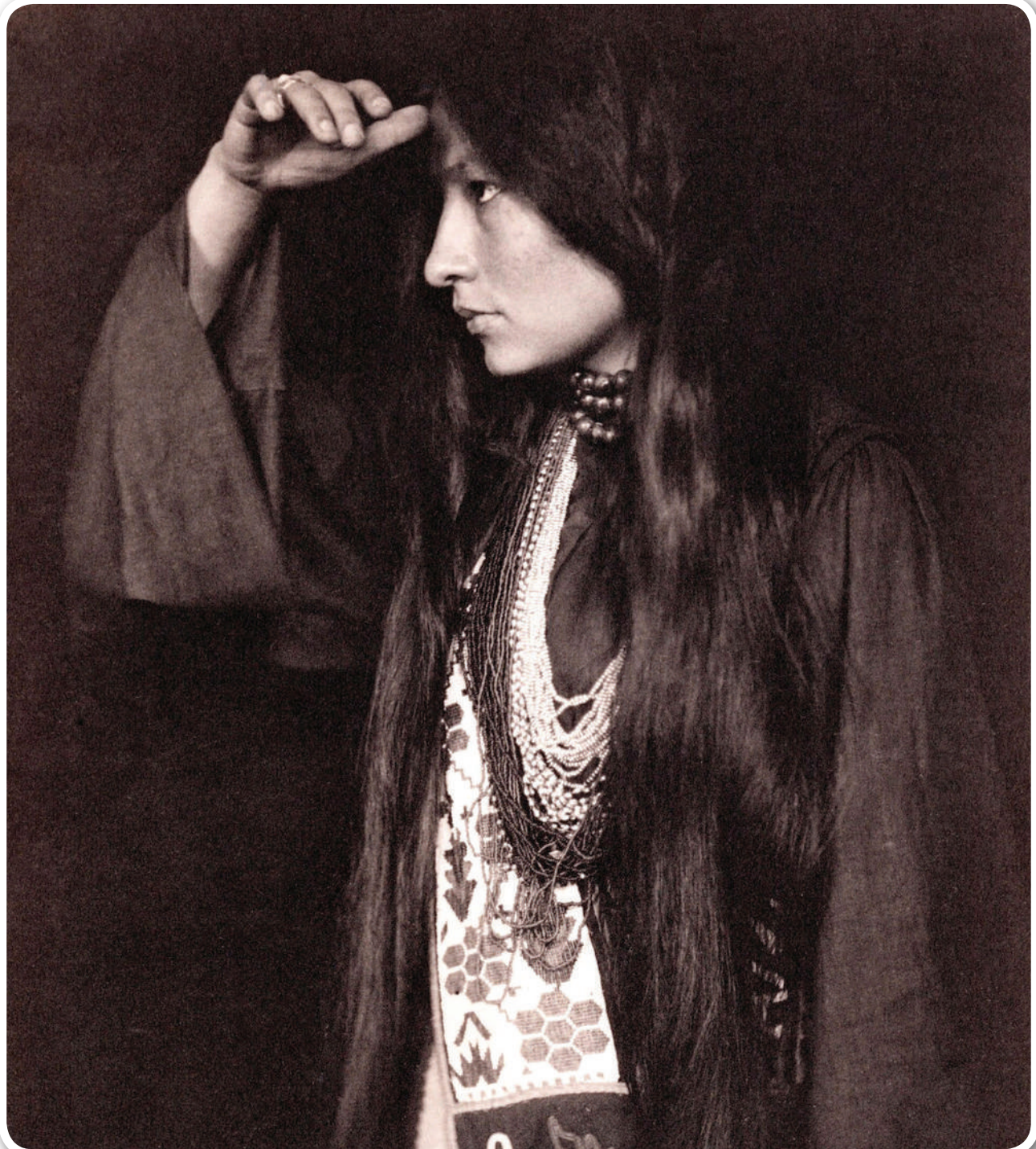
Powerful People

Rules are supposed to keep things fair. But sometimes, the rules are unfair. When that happens, good people speak up.



Abigail Adams is an example of someone who spoke up. Abigail was married to John Adams. He was the second president of the United States. At that time, women had fewer rights than men. Abigail said that the enslavement of people was wrong. And she argued that women should be able to get an education, just like men.

Another person who spoke up against unfair rules was Zitkala-Ša. Zitkala-Ša was Native American. She lived in the early 1900s. She saw that the U.S. government was not giving enough respect to Native American peoples or their cultures.



Zitkala-Ša wrote stories about protecting and saving Native American cultures. Then she created a group to fight for Native American rights. Her work improved the lives of Native Americans. She showed great courage.





Another American person who showed courage was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. When he was growing up, unfair laws said that Black Americans were not allowed to go to the same public places as white Americans. Black students had to attend separate schools.

Dr. King fought for equal rights for Black Americans. He and many other Americans worked to change the unfair laws.

Dr. King's work helped get the laws changed. After that, it was illegal for the government to treat people unfairly because of their race. Today, people continue to work to make sure that all Americans are treated fairly.

All Kinds of Communities

As you have learned, a community is a group of people who share something. Communities often influence a person's identity. Identity means how someone understands themselves. For example, a person might identify with being from Texas. They might have Greek heritage. They might be a baseball fan, practice gymnastics, or play soccer. They might play a musical instrument.



Communities can be different sizes. A classroom is a very small community. A local community is bigger than a classroom. It might be a neighborhood. It could be a town or city. Often, people in a local community share schools, fire departments, and libraries, too.



States are larger communities. People in a certain state might speak in the same way. Some states are known for certain foods or dishes that people living in those states like to eat.

States are often part of larger communities. These communities are called regions. For example, New England is one U.S. region. It is known for its cold winters. It also has bright fall colors and maple syrup. There are six states in New England.

NEW ENGLAND



Countries are communities as well. A country's symbols help bring people from different communities together. The shared history of a country is important, too. The people of a country share and celebrate their country's achievements. They can also feel sadness about bad times in the country's history.



In the United States, different communities have different histories. For example, Native American communities lived in this country long before it was called the United States. Native Americans have special traditions and experiences.



Immigrants are people who moved here from other countries. Immigrants bring their cultures and traditions to the United States.

Communities are filled with people from different places and backgrounds. Understanding differences makes communities stronger. Learning how other people see the world also helps create better rules. Following these rules makes everyone a better member of the community.



What Can You Do for Your Community?

People in a community help each other. For example, neighbors might help one another by sharing. Here is an example. One neighbor has a snow blower. The others don't. The neighbor with the snow blower can help the others. They can clear the snow from the others' driveways and sidewalks. Or they can loan their snow blower to their neighbors. Neighbors can also help others who are sick. They can get them groceries or make food.



You can help your community by looking at what the people in it need. Maybe you have an older neighbor who has trouble getting around. Or maybe your local park has a lot of litter that needs to be picked up. You can show leadership and responsibility by taking action.



Taking action to improve your community is called activism. You can also use your voice to speak up for changes in your community. You might speak up for yourself if you feel something is not fair. You can also speak up for others. Imagine you notice one student being left out of games at recess. How can you speak up for that student?



What Are Laws?

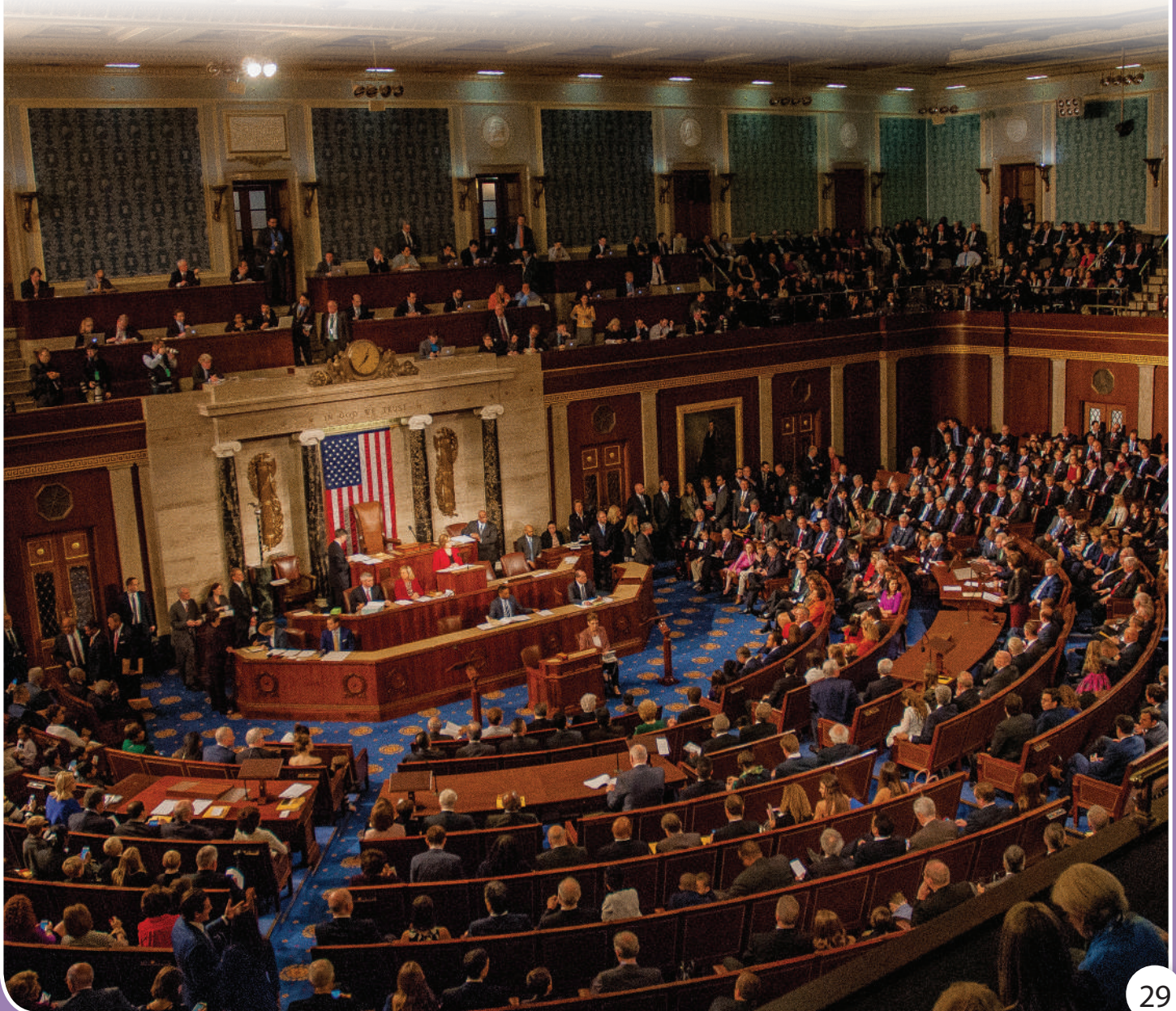
Laws are rules that an entire community follows. Governments make laws for cities, states, and countries. An example of a state law is one that tells people who can vote and how. An example of a national law in the United States is one that protects people from unsafe medicines.

Who is in charge of making laws? In the United States, we elect, or vote for, leaders who make the laws.



We decide on which leaders we want to vote for based on what they say about important things. The leaders we vote for represent us. This is called representative democracy. It is our leaders' job to make things happen and to do the things that people voted for.

The United States government works like this. State and local governments do, too.



Direct democracy is when everyone's vote decides what will happen right away. For example, sports teams often vote for captains. The winner of the team's vote will be the captain. Another example is when your class votes on what game to play during a break.



Sometimes, countries have to work together to make laws. These laws could be about trading goods or ideas. Or they might deal with protecting the environment or people who are suffering in the world.

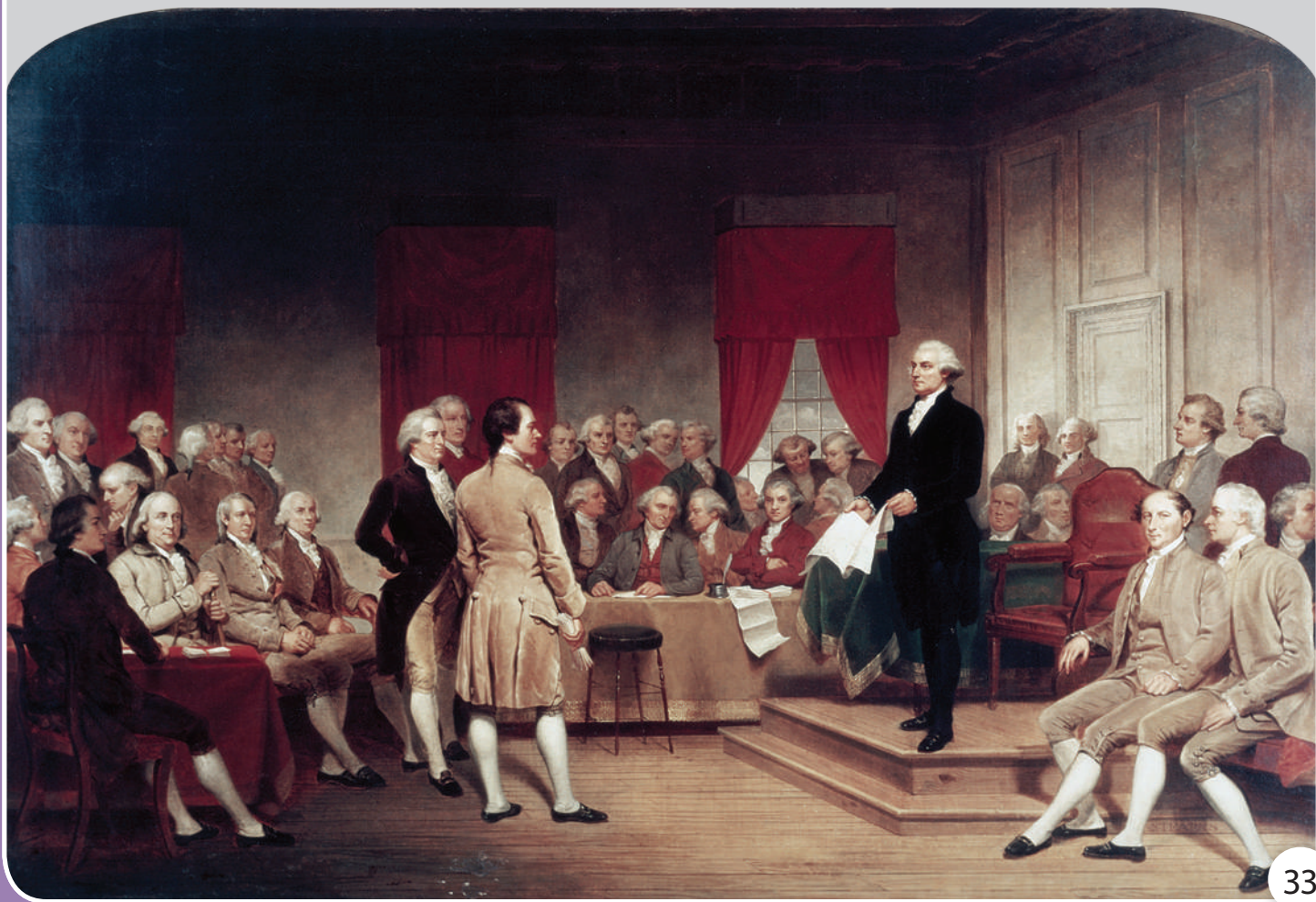


Part of being a good member of a community is following the laws. Communities have several ways of making sure people follow the laws. Police officers are one way to make sure people follow the laws. They write tickets. They also arrest people who may have committed a crime. Judges decide what to do when people don't follow the laws.

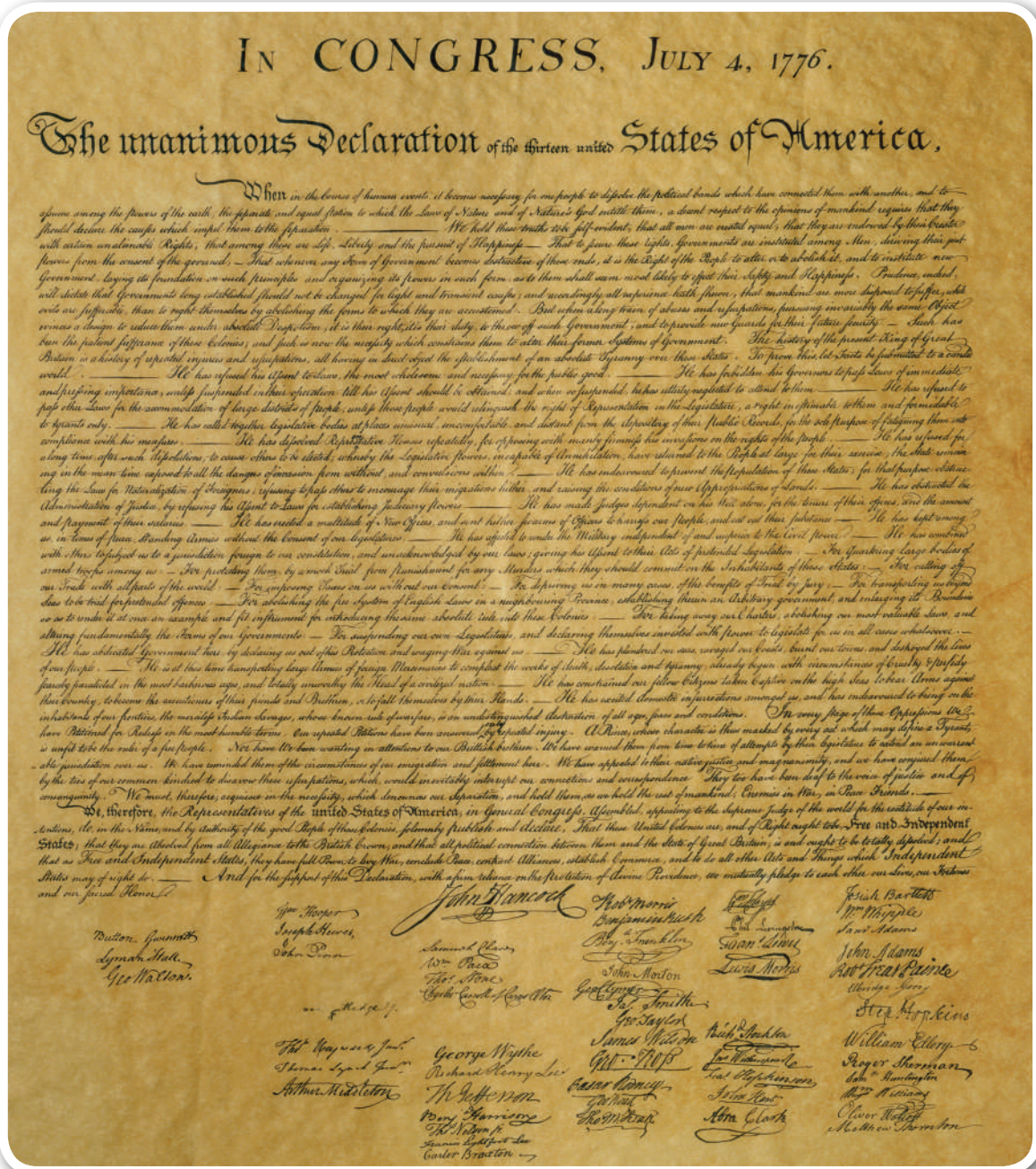


What Does It Mean to Be American?

The people who created the United States of America wrote several important documents. These documents explain what it means to be an American. They explain rules that people must follow. They also explain what makes a good government.



One of these documents is the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence said that Americans would no longer be ruled by Britain. Instead, the thirteen British colonies would become free and independent. The Declaration of Independence also stated that all people are equal and that people have rights.



Another important document is the United States Constitution. This document describes how the U.S. government works. It says what the government can and cannot do. It says that American citizens choose their leaders by voting. These leaders must follow the rules of the Constitution, too. The Constitution protects people's rights. The Constitution can also be amended, or changed. Amendments to the Constitution over time have made it a fairer document.



Another part of being American is recognizing important national holidays. These are days that are special to the country. The Fourth of July is Independence Day. It celebrates the day the Declaration of Independence was approved.

There's also a holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Many people help in their communities on Dr. King Day. Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving are other important national holidays.



Important places are also part of American identity. Some of these places are buildings where the nation's leaders work. The White House is where the president lives and works. The United States Capitol is where the nation's lawmakers work. The body of lawmakers who work in the Capitol is called Congress.



Every country also has its own symbols. A symbol is a thing that represents an idea. One important American symbol is the flag. Another important symbol is the bald eagle. These symbols represent strength and freedom.





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