

# 8 What does it take to be a good citizen?



Usually when people talk about being a good citizen, the first thing that comes up is voting. That's because voting is the most basic act of citizenship. When immigrants become citizens, they nearly always take great pride in being able to vote. They are right to feel this way. There's really nothing more important than the act of marking a ballot and making an informed choice about how we want to shape our future, and who we want to lead us.

But voting is only part of the story. In fact, government is only a part of the story. To be good citizens, we have to think about the whole of our lives – about how we treat the people around us, how well we take care of the natural world, and what impact all our actions will have on the future.

To live in an open, democratic society, we have to accept that not everyone will share our beliefs. (When a society includes and embraces people who have a variety of backgrounds and beliefs, it's called *pluralism*.) In fact, it helps if we all enjoy this diversity. If we only spend time with people who think and act just like us, we would never hear about new ideas that might be better than our own. In the long history of human civilization, the most progress has always been made when people are exposed to new ideas, new ways of looking at things, and new insights – even if those new ways of thinking seem disturbing or difficult to understand at first.