

# Changemakers' Toolkit

## What does it mean to be a citizen?

A citizen is a member of a community or group. Citizens have both rights and responsibilities to the groups that they belong to, as family members, as students in a classroom and school, and as members of their neighborhood, state, and nation.

Rights are things that you are able to do or have by being a member of the group. For example: In a classroom, you have the right to a desk and chair.

In addition to rights, you also have responsibilities. Responsibilities are things that you must do to be a part of the group. In a classroom it is your responsibility to follow the class rules.

## How can you be a good citizen?

A good citizen does not interfere with or take away the rights of others. They recognize that they are part of a larger group of people who all have to live, work, and play together.

## Being a good citizen means:

- Following rules and laws
- Being responsible and respectful
- Helping to take care of shared space and resources

## Ways to be a good citizen at home:

- Clean up after yourself
- Do your chores
- Help take care of plants/pets
- Put away groceries
- Plan fun activities (games night, movie night, etc.) but don't forget to clean up after!

## Ways to be a good citizen at school:

- Take care of shared materials (crayons, pencils, books, toys, etc.)
- Play by the rules and use good sportsmanship
- Support others by being kind

## Ways to be a good citizen in your community:

- Take care of parks and playgrounds
- Recycle
- Follow laws and regulations



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## What happens when rules are unfair?

Sometimes laws, rules, or regulations are out of date or unfair. For example, Dane Best lived in a small Colorado town where snowball fights were against the law. For over 100 years, kids couldn't have snowball fights, until Dane and his classmates wrote letters to their local legislators asking them to change the law. And they did!

When you notice that something is unfair or unequal, you might be drawn to help. That makes you an advocate. Advocates are people who work to make the world a more fair, just, and secure place. Some advocates work to protect the environment, some work to help animals; other advocates work to make sure kids stay safe, or workers get paid a fair wage. Advocates are important changemakers!

There are many ways to be an advocate.

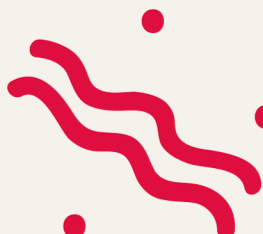
## How to be an advocate:



First, find something that you are passionate about. List different things that you care about then research the topic. Think about what it means to be fair? Think about school, classroom, and community rules and why they are important. Think:

What are some things that are unfair? Is there a rule that you would want to change? Why? Are there any current events that impact you or your community? What are some problems that kids in your area face?

Think of who you would need to talk to, in order for there to be change. If you are advocating for a later bedtime, you're going to need to convince your parents. If you are advocating for a new basketball hoop on the school playground, you'll need to convince the principal, parents, and teachers. If you are advocating for a community garden in your neighborhood, you'll have to convince your neighbors and the local city council.



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## Write a letter

Introduce yourself and why you are writing. Include any details and research that will help people understand why this is a problem. Present your solutions. Don't forget to thank them for their time.

## Give a speech

A speech is a great way to reach many people at one time. Some places you might give a speech would be: a PTA meeting, school board meetings, City Council meetings.

## Volunteer

Your time is the most valuable thing you have. Volunteering is a great way to show your support. Animal shelters, food banks, libraries, and many other community groups rely on volunteers to help make a difference.

## Make a Petition

A petition is a request that includes a list of names of people who agree with your request. For example, if you are advocating for new activities for your school's field day, you might want to show how many other students also want new field day games.

## Talk about it

Sometimes you may not know how to solve a problem, but being able to talk about the problem helps raise awareness. For example, did you know that 61% of kids don't have books at home? Who could you talk to about this problem? Your parents? Your teachers? Your elected representatives? The more people that are aware of the problem, the greater chance someone will come up with a solution.

# sample Letter

Dear Councilwoman Jackson,

My name is Rebecca Sanchez and I live in the Riverway neighborhood. I am writing to ask for your help in getting a trash can put near the playground in Belmont Park. Belmont Park is the best park around. My friends and I love to play there. But the problem is there is no trash can near the playground. The only trash can is on the other side of the picnic tables. Lots of people don't want to walk that far and just leave trash on the tables. The last few times my mom and I went to the playground the trash had blown off the table and on to the playground.

Councilwoman Jackson please consider adding a trash can near the playground to keep Belmont Park beautiful. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,  
Rebecca Sanchez

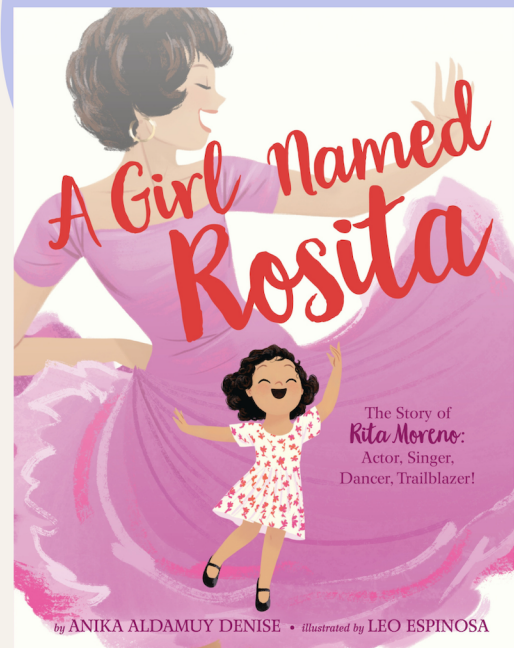
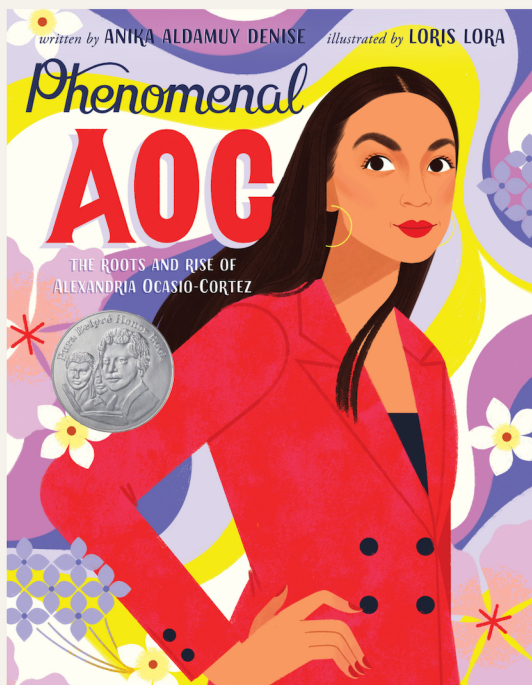


# Example Petition

Petition to add a bike lane on Franklin Street so that kids can ride their bikes safely from Thomas Elementary to Belmont Park.

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# Books About Changemakers by Anika Aldamuy Denise



Also available in Spanish

Learn more at the author's website: [anikadenise.com](http://anikadenise.com)