
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What makes a good citizen?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgie

And I'm Georgie.

Neil

Georgie, what do you think makes a good citizen?

Georgie

Ooh, interesting question. I think a good citizen is someone who doesn't break the law and is generally kind to other people. What about you? Any ideas?

Neil

Yeah, I agree. But also maybe people who volunteer – so, people who run clubs for children and that kind of thing. I think they're good citizens. Now, being a citizen, a member of society who enjoys certain rights in return for having certain responsibilities, is an old idea that's been in the news a lot recently. It's something that interests Myra Anubi, presenter of BBC World Service programme People Fixing the World.

Myra Anubi

What do you think makes a good citizen? Is it someone who follows **the laws of the land** and pays their taxes? Well, some people might say it should go beyond that, and a good citizen is one who tries to improve the place where they live.

Georgie

A good citizen obeys **the law of the land** – a term for the set of rules and laws that exists in a country. But should there be more to it than that?

Neil

Around the world, young people today are less likely to vote, and many people aged 18 to 30 say they feel ignored by politicians. So, in this programme, we'll be hearing about MyPolis, an exciting project helping young people in Portugal re-engage with their citizenship. And, as usual, we'll be learning some useful new words and phrases, all of which you'll find on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Georgie

But before that, I have a question for you, Neil. The project's name, MyPolis, comes from the ancient Greek states, such as Athens and Sparta, where the idea of citizenship was born. So, what is the meaning of the Ancient Greek word 'polis'? Is it:

- a) vote,
- b) people, or
- c) city?

Neil

Hmm, that's a good question. I'm going to guess b) people.

Georgie

OK. Well, I'll reveal the correct answer later in the programme. MyPolis runs council assemblies where children can propose improvements to their local school community – anything from fixing broken water fountains to changing the curriculum. Local politicians also attend, listening to the children's ideas and responding by giving their support or explaining why not.

Neil

The project was started by founder Bernardo Goncalves when he was in his 20s, because he was disappointed by interactions between political parties and young people. Here's Bernardo telling more to BBC World Service programme People Fixing the World:

Bernardo Goncalves

We have seen a quick **erosion in the trust** of the population in the democratic institutions, such as the National Parliament, such as the government **in office**. We need to find new ways to connect children and young citizens to democratic institutions, otherwise the gap will get bigger and bigger. This is very dangerous for democracy.

Georgie

Bernardo thinks Portugal has seen an **erosion of trust** – a term for the gradual weakening of people's confidence in political and economic institutions, and the government **in office**. A government **in office** means the government in power at the present time.

Neil

MyPolis mirrors the political activities that children will need as adult citizens – things like voting and holding politicians accountable. Reporter Alison Roberts visited schools around the Portuguese capital Lisbon and was impressed by what she saw, as she explains here to Myra Anubi, presenter of BBC World Service's People Fixing the World:

Alison Roberts

Another benefit is MyPolis has designed the programme so it can be included as part of the national curriculum, rather than as an **add-on**.

Myra Anubi

Mmm. Well, it's good to know that this is happening in other places, but the thing that also really strikes me here is that politicians are actually listening to these kids and **taking them seriously**, giving them answers, because politicians, as we know, can be hard to **pin down**.

Georgie

The MyPolis programme is designed as part of the whole school curriculum and not just an **add-on**, meaning something extra that is added later, instead of being planned in from the start.

Neil

Myra was impressed that local politicians **take** the school children **seriously**. If you **take someone** or **something seriously**, you think it's important and deserves attention. And that's good because, as everyone knows, politicians can be hard to **pin down**. To **pin someone down** means to force them to explain their plans and intentions in detail.

Georgie

It sounds like the programme is really developing active citizens of the future in Portugal. In fact, it's been so successful that similar programmes have been started in Italy, Hungary and Mozambique. OK. Neil, I think I should reveal the answer to my question. I asked you, "What is the meaning of the Ancient Greek

word 'polis'?" And you said, "People," which was the wrong answer, I'm afraid. The right answer was c) city.

Neil

Argh, no! Right, it's time to recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **the law of the land** – a term for the set of rules and laws that exists in a country.

Georgie

An **erosion of trust** happens when people gradually lose confidence in political and economic institutions.

Neil

If a government is **in office**, it means they are currently in power.

Georgie

An **add-on** is an extra part that is added to something later, rather than being built in from the start.

Neil

If you **take someone seriously**, you consider them important and worthy of your attention.

Georgie

And finally, if you find it hard to **pin someone down**, it's difficult to find out their specific plans and intentions. Once again, our six minutes are up but remember you'll find a quiz and worksheet for this episode over on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. See you there soon. Bye!

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

the law of the land

the set of rules and laws that exists in a certain place

erosion of trust

gradual weakening of people's confidence in political and economic institutions and systems

in office

in power at the present time

add-on

extra part that is added later, rather than being planned in from the start

take someone/something seriously

think that someone or something is important and deserves attention

pin down

force someone to be specific about their plans and intentions