



## **250 Years of Freedom & Responsibility**

**Grades:** 3–4

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

### **Lesson Synopsis:**

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, students will explore how freedom and responsibility are connected. Students will learn that caring for their community—including parks, rivers, and public spaces—is one-way citizens demonstrate responsibility. Through discussion, a problem-solving activity, and a community action poster project, students will discover how their everyday choices help protect the environment in Sevier County.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between freedom and responsibility.
2. Identify local environmental challenges such as litter or pollution.
3. Describe how individual actions affect wildlife and water quality.
4. Propose solutions that improve their community.

### **Tennessee Standards Alignment**

#### **Social Studies**

##### **3rd Grade**

3.20 – Describe how citizens contribute to their communities.

##### **4th Grade**

4.18 – Explain the responsibilities of citizenship.

#### **Science**

##### **3rd Grade**

3.ESS3.3 – Explain how human activities affect the environment.

##### **4th Grade**

4.ESS3.1 – Obtain information about human impacts on Earth systems.

### **Background for Instructor**

In 2026, the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary. This milestone is a good opportunity to help students learn that freedom and responsibility go together. People in America have freedoms, but they also have responsibilities to help care for their communities.

Students can understand citizenship through everyday actions. Taking care of parks, rivers, forests, and neighborhoods is one way people show responsibility. These places are shared by everyone, so citizens help keep them clean and safe.

This lesson connects to Sevier County, where many people visit to enjoy the Smoky Mountains, local parks, rivers, and wildlife. Because so many people visit, it is important for both residents and visitors to help protect these natural places from problems like litter and pollution.

**Key Vocabulary:**

**Citizen** – A person who is part of a community, city, state, or country and helps follow rules and take care of the place where they live.

**Responsibility** – Something a person is expected to do, such as helping others, following rules, and taking care of the environment.

**Environmental Stewardship** – Taking care of the Earth by protecting nature and making choices that keep the environment healthy.

**Natural Resources** – Materials that come from nature and are useful to people, such as water, trees, soil, air, and minerals.

**Pollution** – Harmful materials or waste that dirty the air, water, or land and can hurt people, animals, and plants.

**Conservation** – Protecting and using natural resources carefully so they will still be available in the future.

**Materials:**

1. Chart paper or whiteboard
2. Scenario cards (community situations)
3. Poster paper
4. Markers / crayons
5. Photos of Sevier County parks, rivers, and forests

**Lesson Procedure**

**1. Introduction (10 minutes)**

Write the essential question:

How can we celebrate America’s 250th birthday by taking care of our community? Discuss:

What freedoms do people have in America?

What responsibilities come with those freedoms?

Explain:

Responsible citizens help protect the places everyone shares—parks, rivers, forests, and neighborhoods.

**2. Local Connection Discussion (10 minutes)**

Ask students:

Why do people visit Sevier County?

What could happen if visitors or residents’ litter?

How could pollution affect wildlife in the Smoky Mountains?

Show photos of:

Local parks

Rivers  
Wildlife

Discuss why these places need protection.

### **3. Community Problem-Solving Activity (15 minutes)**

Divide students into small groups.

Each group receives a community scenario card, such as:

- Trash left behind after a picnic.
- Plastic bottles floating in a river.
- Overflowing trash cans at a park.
- Visitors leaving food waste that attracts wildlife.

Groups discuss:

- What is the problem?
- Who might be affected?
- What could people do to fix or prevent it?

Groups share solutions with the class.

### **4. “Citizens Care” Poster Project (20 minutes)**

Students create posters titled:

“How We Can Care for Our Community”

Students illustrate and label actions such as:

- Picking up litter
- Recycling
- Conserving water
- Respecting wildlife
- Using reusable items

Encourage students to include local places like parks or rivers. Display posters in the classroom or hallway.

#### **Assessment:**

##### **Informal**

Observe:

Participation in discussions

Ability to identify environmental problems

Quality of group solutions

#### **Students respond in writing:**

“One way I can help care for my community is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”