



250 Years of Freedom & Responsibility

Grades: 5th-6th

Time Required: 60 minutes

Lesson Synopsis:

Students will explore the idea that freedom in a democracy includes civic responsibilities. They will examine how environmental stewardship is an important form of citizenship. Through analysis, discussion, and a short action plan activity, students will connect national history to local environmental responsibility in Sevier County.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Analyze the connection between citizenship and environmental responsibility.
2. Examine how pollution impacts ecosystems and communities.
3. Evaluate solutions to environmental challenges.
4. Develop a personal or community action plan.

Tennessee Standards Alignment

5th Grade

5.21 – Describe civic responsibilities of citizens.

5.ESS3 – Human impact on Earth systems.

6th Grade

6.10 – Explain how citizens participate in civic life.

6.ESS3 – Human activities affecting natural resources.

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:

Civic Responsibility – The duties and actions citizens take to help their community, such as following laws, helping others, and protecting shared spaces and resources.

Environmental Stewardship – The responsibility people must care for and protect the natural environment so it stays healthy for future generations.

Sustainability – Using natural resources in a way that meets our needs today while ensuring those resources will still be available in the future.

Pollution – The introduction of harmful substances or waste into the air, water, or land that can damage ecosystems and harm living things.

Ecosystem – A community of living things, such as plants and animals, interacting with each other and with their physical environment, including soil, water, and air.

Conservation – The protection and careful management of natural resources to prevent waste, damage, or loss.

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
6. Stormwater pathway diagram (neighborhood → storm drain → river → wildlife habitat)
7. Community Action Plan Template

Lesson Procedure

1. Opening Discussion (10 minutes)

Write:

Does freedom come with responsibility?

Discuss examples:

- Laws
- Voting
- Community service
- Protecting shared resources

Connect this idea to environmental stewardship.

2. Local Environmental Impact Mini-Lesson (15 minutes)

Explain:

Sevier County welcomes millions of visitors each year due to the Great Smoky Mountains.

Discuss possible impacts:

- Increased litter
- Water pollution
- Wildlife disturbance
- Strain on natural resources

Ask:

How might tourism both help and harm the environment?

Why is protecting natural spaces important for the community?

3. “From Trash to River” Demonstration (10 minutes)

Draw a pathway:

Neighborhood → Storm Drain → River → Wildlife Habitat

Explain how litter can travel through stormwater systems.

Discuss:

Microplastics, Water contamination, Impact on animals

4. Community Action Plan Activity (25 minutes)

Students work individually or in small groups.

Prompt:

Design a plan to help keep your community clean.

Plans may include:

- Organizing a school cleanup
- Encouraging recycling
- Educating visitors
- Creating posters or social media campaigns

Students outline:

- The problem
- Who is affected
- A realistic solution
- How students could help

Groups briefly present their ideas.

Assessment:

Reflection Writing: Students respond:

Why is environmental stewardship an important responsibility of citizens?

Encourage a paragraph response with examples.

Community Action Plan Template:

Student Name(s): _____

Date: _____

Title of Our Plan:

1. Identify the Problem

What environmental problem do you see in your community?

Examples: litter in parks, trash in rivers, pollution, wildlife being disturbed.

2. Who Is Affected?

Who or what is impacted by this problem?

Examples: people, animals, rivers, forests, visitors, or the community.

3. Why Is This Problem Important?

Explain why this issue matters and what could happen if it is not fixed.

4. Our Solution

What is one realistic action students or the community could take to help solve this problem?

- Organize a cleanup
- Encourage recycling
- Create educational posters
- Share information with visitors
- Other: _____

Describe your plan:

5. How Students Can Help

List two or three actions students could take.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6. Expected Outcome

What positive change do you hope to see if your plan works?

7. Reflection

Why is environmental stewardship an important responsibility of citizens?