



250 Years of Freedom & Responsibility

Grade Level: Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

Time Required: 45–60 minutes

Lesson Synopsis

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, students will explore the connection between freedom and responsibility. This lesson introduces young learners to the idea that being a good citizen includes caring for shared spaces, protecting natural resources, and helping keep their community clean. Through literature, discussion, sorting activities, and a collaborative mural, students will learn that environmental stewardship is one way to celebrate America’s history and contribute positively to their local community in Sevier County. The lesson emphasizes that even young children can make meaningful contributions to keeping America beautiful.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify at least three ways individuals can care for their community.
- Explain how litter can affect people, animals, and shared spaces.
- Sort actions into responsible and irresponsible environmental behaviors.
- Describe one personal action they can take to help keep their community clean.

Tennessee Standards Alignment

Social Studies (K–2)

K.23 – Identify responsibilities of being a good citizen.

1.20 – Describe ways individuals contribute to their community.

2.19 – Explain how people can work together to improve communities.

Science (K–2)

K.ESS3.3 – Communicate solutions that reduce human impact on land.

1.ESS3.3 – Describe ways humans protect Earth’s resources.

2.ESS3.1 – Explain how human activities affect land and water.

Background Information for the Instructor

The 250th anniversary of the United States offers an opportunity to teach students that freedom includes responsibility. Civic responsibility extends beyond voting and laws—it includes caring for public lands, neighborhoods, parks, schools, and natural spaces.

In Sevier County, environmental stewardship is especially important because: • The county welcomes millions of visitors annually due to its proximity to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

- Tourism supports the local economy, but increased visitors can lead to litter, water pollution, and strain on natural resources.
- Protecting local rivers, forests, wildlife, and scenic beauty helps preserve the community for future generations.
- Young students can understand that keeping their classroom, playground, and neighborhood clean is part of being a responsible American citizen.

Key Vocabulary

Community – A group of people who live and work in the same place.

Responsibility – Something you are expected to take care of or do.

Citizen – A person who belongs to a country and has rights and responsibilities. Litter – Trash that is left on the ground instead of thrown away properly.

Recycle – To turn used materials into new products instead of throwing them away. Natural Resources – Things from nature that people use, like water, trees, and land.

Materials List

- One selected read-aloud book (see suggestions below)
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Printed sorting cards (responsible vs. irresponsible actions)
- Two sorting labels: “Good for Our Community” / “Not Good for Our Community” • Large bulletin board paper for mural
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Glue sticks
- Optional: Printed images of local parks, rivers, or mountains in Sevier County

Lesson Procedure

1. Introduction (5–7 minutes)

Write the essential question on the board:

How can we celebrate 250 years of America by protecting and improving the land we call home? Explain in age-appropriate language:

“America is turning 250 years old. When our country was founded, people were given freedoms. But freedom also means responsibility. One responsibility we all share is taking care of our community.”

Ask:

- What makes our community special?
- What places do you like to visit outside?
- What happens if no one takes care of those places?

2. Read-Aloud & Guided Discussion (10–15 minutes)

Select one of the following books:

Michael Recycle

The Great Trash Bash

I Can Save the Earth!: One Little Monster Learns to Reduce, Reuse, and

Recycle We Recycle

A Tree Is Nice

Before Reading

Listen for ways the characters take care of their world.

During Reading

Pause to ask purposeful questions:

- How is this character being responsible?
- Who benefits from this action?
- What might happen if nobody helped?

After Reading

Discuss:

- What problem did the characters solve?
- How did working together help?
- How is this similar to our community?

3. Mini Visual: How Trash Travels (5 minutes)

Draw a simple diagram on the board:

Home → Street → Storm Drain → River → Wildlife

Explain how litter left on the ground can travel through rainwater into local rivers and affect animals. Connect locally by mentioning rivers in Sevier County and wildlife that depend on clean water.

Ask:

- Where does trash go if we don't pick it up?
- Who might be affected?

4. “Freedom to Care” Sorting Activity (10–15 minutes)

Setup: Place two large labels on the board or floor:

1. Good for Our Community
2. Not Good for Our Community

Provide picture cards showing actions such as:

- Picking up trash
- Recycling
- Planting flowers
- Throwing trash on the ground
- Wasting water

Students take turns sorting cards into categories.

Discussion Prompts:

- Why did you choose that category?
- Who benefits from this action?
- How does this show responsibility?
- Reinforce correct reasoning rather than just correct placement.

5. 250th Anniversary Class Mural (10–15 minutes)

Title: "250 Years of Caring for Our Home"

Students draw themselves doing one helpful action in their community.

Encourage specific ideas:

- Picking up litter at a park
- Recycling at home
- Planting flowers
- Saving water

Display the mural in the classroom or hallway.

Why This Topic Matters (Local Connection):

Sevier County's natural beauty is central to its identity and economy. Clean parks, safe waterways, and healthy forests attract visitors and provide recreational opportunities for families. Teaching students early that their actions matter helps build lifelong habits of environmental responsibility. When children understand that citizenship includes caring for shared spaces, they develop pride in their community and ownership of its future.

Evaluation / Assessment

Informal Assessment (During Lesson) Observe participation in discussion. Listen for correct use of vocabulary.

Monitor sorting activity reasoning.

Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

Ask students to respond verbally or draw a quick picture answering:

- Name one way you can care for your community.
- Why is it important not to litter?

Optional Written Assessment (2nd Grade)

Students complete the sentence:

"Being a good citizen means I will _____ because _____."

Visual & Implementation Notes for Teachers:

- Include printed photos of local parks or mountains to strengthen real-world connection.
- Laminate sorting cards for reuse.
- Provide a simple printed diagram of "How Trash Travels" for visual learners.
- Keep activity transitions structured and clear to maximize engagement.