

Literacy Links

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a newsletter for volunteer tutors

editor, Peggy L. Murphy, Portland Literacy Council

Maneuvering the Citizenship Maze

by Peggy L. Murphy

Immigrant students are curious about how to get US citizenship, and it's logical to turn to a tutor for answers. As many tutors are citizens by birth, they may wonder where to start looking for answers. The Internet is certainly a good starting place, and fortunately, there are many other resources available in the Portland metropolitan area.

One of the first places to look for citizenship resources is the Portland Literacy Council website. The "Student" page lists organizations that provide assistance, along with contact information: Goodwill Industries, El Programa Hispano (Gresham), Asian Health & Service Center, All Saints Church, and Jesuit High School English Language Outreach.

The federal government has an extensive website at the US Citizenship & Immigration Services, as well as a local office. The website has a wide array of free study materials including videos, printed materials, and online practice tests.

Multnomah County Library has wide-ranging resources including free citizenship classes that focus on self-study and preparation for the citizenship exam (use the Event Finder). Clackamas Community College Citizenship Preparation (CIV-007) is being offered winter term 2011, focuses on self-study. At Mt. Hood Community College, Citizenship (DE6CIT) a free class offered winter term 2011, prepares students for the citizenship interview. The Volunteer Literacy Tutor program at Portland Community College occasionally also offers citizenship assistance.

Nongovernment organizations (NGO) including Jewish Family & Child Services, Lutheran Family Services, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and the Center for Intercultural Organizing all have citizenship programs. United States Immigration, another NGO, describes itself as "the most comprehensive guide for those seeking information on US immigration policies." United States Immigration's website includes referrals to immigration lawyers, attorneys and nonprofit agencies, as well as FAQs about related issues.

As you can see, we have a readily accessible, useful, and reliable supply of information on citizenship. With so many choices, the tutor's task may become helping the student maneuver the maze.

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The Mother Lode of Citizenship Resources

by Melissa Madenski, Adult Literacy Coordinator, Multnomah County Library,
and Peggy L. Murphy

Multnomah County Library is rich in citizenship resources - classes, books, videos, and access to online videos via the Internet.

Citizenship assistance has been offered since the 1920s, with classes designed for noncitizens. The current program offers fourteen six-session citizenship preparation classes yearly, free of charge, throughout the county. Volunteer instructors teach the classes, and local immigration attorneys volunteer to provide a general legal overview. Students receive flash cards for 100 US Civics Questions; ten questions will be asked during a naturalization interview. Students also receive a US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) booklet, "Learn About the United States," with more detail about each question.



Melissa Madenski (third from left) with citizenship students

Twelve teams played two 60-minute games. The Library's six class modules include discussion of the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution, branches of government, rights and responsibilities of citizens, Native Americans and westward expansion, historical eras and their significance, and geography. The modules are keyed to the USCIS 100 Civics Questions. Lesson plans provide opportunities to view videos such as the USCIS naturalization interview, early colonists, slavery, the 1960s, civil rights, and women's issues. Because language can be a barrier, applicants can expect to demonstrate some proficiency in reading and writing English during their naturalization interview. Instructors provide opportunities for small talk, reading and writing during each class, and students can also attend "Talk Time" at some branches for more English practice.

To access books, videos, and online resources, use the library's online catalog. Don't overlook the value of the library's collection of children's books. Who wouldn't be drawn to "The Dreadful, Smelly Colonies: The Disgusting Details About Life in Colonial America", by Elizabeth Raum. (I have it on good authority that it is a most informative read!)

Does Everybody Know This Stuff?

by Peggy L. Murphy

I taught a citizenship class for Multnomah County this fall at the county's new Kenton library branch. I dutifully quizzed my students each class using the 100 US Civics Questions provided by USCIS.

One of my students was extremely fascinated with US history and since English was not a barrier for her, she could ask me some hard questions about being an American. She wanted to know: "Does everybody know this stuff?" (She asked some form of this question every session.) She also wanted to know why the largest city in each state was not the capital. Since it was election season, she was flabbergasted that her friends who complained so much about government didn't vote or even attend a school board meeting.

Could you answer the 100 Civics Questions? Tutors, here's a miniquiz (from the "100").

1. Name one state that borders Canada. (Hint: there are thirteen.)
2. Name one war fought by the United States in the 1900s. (Hint: there were five.)
3. There were thirteen original states. Name three.
4. When was the Constitution written?
5. What are two Cabinet-level positions? (Hint: there are sixteen.)

Bonus questions

6. Why is the Presidential election held in November? (Hint: the U.S. was an agricultural society then, and there was no vote-by-mail.)
7. Which early Vice President went home to Virginia because the President didn't like him? (Hint: nastiness in US politics is not a modern phenomenon.)

Answers

Questions 1-5 - You should be able to easily find the answers on your own. If not, try the US Citizenship & Immigration services website; search for "Civics Flash Cards."

Question 6 - Presidential elections are held in November because the crops were harvested and the delegates had time to travel to the polls (source: "Learn About the United States", Quick Civics Lessons for the New Naturalization Test; online at USCIS).

Question 7 - John Adams (Federalist Party), the third US President, and the elected Vice President, Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican Party), did not get along, so Jefferson went home.

When I first started teaching the citizenship class, my biggest fear was that I would be boring. Then I was afraid of the 100 Civics Questions, and flubbing the answers. It was challenging to be prepared for each class, and even more challenging to keep focused on the lesson plans. I became so fascinated by our history and what it means to be a good citizen that I had to concentrate on not giving my students too much information. I truly felt privileged to be able to help my students on their road to citizenship.

And I regrettably admitted to my students that I don't think everybody knows this stuff.

Announcements

Promoting literacy in our community.
Portland Literacy Council
P.O. Box 2872
Portland, OR 97208-2872

2010-2011
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Upcoming Events

Mark your calender for the following events.

Volunteer Literacy Tutor Training - Jan. 22 & 29, 2011
Clackamas Community College, Harmony Campus OIT
Tell a friend!

Tutor Conference Online Registration - February 2011
See the PLC website in February

Annual Tutor Conference - March 19, 2011
Reed College - See you there!



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