

# The Path to U.S. Citizenship

## LVCA Tutor Retreat

Paige Zelikow [paige@literacyforall.org](mailto:paige@literacyforall.org)



# Workshop Goals

- ◆ Understanding the Naturalization Process
- ◆ Eligibility
- ◆ Steps to Naturalization
- ◆ Components of the Test
  - ◆ Civics questions
  - ◆ Reading and Writing
  - ◆ English Speaking and the Naturalization Interview
- ◆ Resources

# What is Naturalization?

- ◆ Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

# Who Administers the Naturalization Test?

- ◆ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.
- ◆ The USCIS is an agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- ◆ “USCIS is funded almost completely by the fees paid by individuals and organizations for immigration and naturalization services. The agency receives very little taxpayer money. “

# Why Do People Want to Become a U.S. Citizen?



# Benefits of U.S. Citizenship?

- ◆ **Vote.** Only citizens can vote in federal elections. Most states also restrict the right to vote, in most elections, to U.S. citizens.
- ◆ **Serve on a jury.** Only U.S. citizens can serve on a federal jury. Most states also restrict jury service to U.S. citizens. Serving on a jury is an important responsibility for U.S. citizens.
- ◆ **Travel with a U.S. passport.** A U.S. passport enables you to get assistance from the U.S. government when overseas, if necessary.
- ◆ **Bring family members to the U.S.** U.S. citizens generally get priority when petitioning to bring family members permanently to this country.
- ◆ **Obtain citizenship for children under 18 years of age.** In most cases, a child born abroad to a U.S. citizen is automatically a U.S. citizen.

# Benefits of U.S. Citizenship?

- ◆ **Apply for federal jobs.** Certain jobs with government agencies require U.S. citizenship.
- ◆ **Become an elected official.** Only citizens can run for federal office (U.S. Senate or House of Representatives) and for most state and local offices.
- ◆ **Keep your residency.** A U.S. citizen's right to remain in the United States cannot be taken away.
- ◆ **Become eligible for federal grants and scholarships.** Many financial aid grants, including college scholarships and funds given by the government for specific purposes, are available only to U.S. citizens.
- ◆ **Obtain government benefits.** Some government benefits are available only to U.S. citizens.

# Naturalization Statistics

- ◆ Each year, the United States welcomes approximately 700,000 new citizens.
- ◆ In FY 2016, the top countries of origin for naturalization were in the following order: Mexico, India, the Philippines, China, and the Dominican Republic.
- ◆ The national pass rate on the naturalization test is 91%.

*(USCIS website)*



# Who is Eligible?

- **Be at least 18 years old.**
- **Be a permanent resident (have a “green card”) for at least 5 years. (Three years if married to a U.S. citizen.)**
- **Meet certain continuous residency requirements.**
- **Be able to read, write, and speak basic English.**
- **Have a basic understanding of U.S. history and government (“100 questions”).**
- **Be a person of good moral character and demonstrate an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution.**

# Some Eligibility Exceptions

- ◆ **English Language Exemptions**
- ◆ You Are Exempt From The English Language Requirement, But Are Still Required To Take The Civics Test If You Are:
- ◆ Age 50 or older at the time of filing for naturalization and have lived as a permanent resident in the United States for 20 years; OR
- ◆ Age 55 or older at the time of filing for naturalization and have lived as a permanent resident in the United States for 15 years.

# Some Eligibility Exceptions

- ◆ Even if you qualify for the “50/20” or “55/15” English language exceptions listed above, you must still take the civics test.
- ◆ You will be permitted to take the civics test in your native language.
- ◆ If you take the test in your native language, you must bring an interpreter with you to your interview.
- ◆ Your interpreter must be fluent in both English and your native language.

# Steps to Naturalization

- ◆ Study for the interview and test
- ◆ Submit N-400 Application for Naturalization
  - ◆ (Fee is \$640 plus \$85 biometric fee = total \$725)
- ◆ Go to the biometrics (fingerprinting) appointment
- ◆ Complete the interview
- ◆ After passing the test, take the Oath of Allegiance

**\* International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sin Barreras in Charlottesville offer low cost assistance with the N400 application**

# Fee Waivers and Reductions

- ◆ Applicants may qualify for a fee waiver if their income falls below 150 percent of the current federal poverty guidelines. (\$36,450 for a family of 4, for example.)
- ◆ Applicants may request a reduced fee if their annual household income is greater than 150 percent and not more than 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. (\$48,600 for a family of 4, for example.)

# What are the Components of the Test?

- ◆ **Applicants must:**

- ◆ Correctly answer 6 out of 10 questions about U.S. history, government, symbols, holidays, and geography. To prepare, applicants must study all 100 possible questions; and
- ◆ Correctly read 1 sentence (3 chances); and
- ◆ Correctly write 1 dictated sentence (3 chances); and
- ◆ Demonstrate the ability to speak English based on answers to questions normally asked during the interview, including questions about the N400. ***For many, this is the hardest part.***

# The “100 Questions.”



# Would You Pass?

- The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?
- Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?
- What is the economic system in the United States?
- Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
- Who was president during WWI?
- How many voting members in the U.S. House of Representatives?



# Reading Vocabulary

## Reading Vocabulary for the Naturalization Test

PEOPLE	CIVICS	PLACES	HOLIDAYS	QUESTION WORDS	VERBS	OTHER (FUNCTION)	OTHER (CONTENT)
Abraham Lincoln	American flag	America	Presidents' Day	How	can	a	colors
George Washington	Bill of Rights	United States	Memorial Day	What	come	for	dollar bill
	capital	U.S.	Flag Day	When	do/does	here	first
	citizen		Independence Day	Where	elects	in	largest
	city		Labor Day	Who	have/has	of	many
	Congress		Columbus Day	Why	is/are/was/be	on	most
	country		Thanksgiving		lives/lived	the	north
	Father of Our Country				meet	to	one
	government				name	we	people
	President				pay		second
	right				vote		south
	Senators				want		
	state/states						
	White House						

# Sample Reading Questions

- ◆ Who is the Father of our Country?
- ◆ What colors are on the American Flag?
- ◆ When is Independence Day?
- ◆ What state has the most people?



# Sample Writing Questions

- ◆ George Washington is the Father of Our Country.
- ◆ The flag is red, white, and blue.
- ◆ Independence Day is in July.
- ◆ California has the most people.

# The Naturalization Interview

- ◆ Applicants demonstrate basic English speaking proficiency during the interview:
  - ◆ By engaging in greetings and “small talk”
  - ◆ Following commands
  - ◆ Answering N400 questions: Personal information
  - ◆ Answering N400 questions: Good moral character / “Have you ever...” questions

# Examples of Vocabulary from N400

- ✔ **Verify**
- ✔ **Swear**
- ✔ **Marital Status**
- ✔ **Spouse**
- ✔ **Advocated**
- ✔ **Prior**
- ✔ **Resident**
- ✔ **Dependents**

# Examples of “Have you EVER...?”

- ◆ **Been a member of any organization, party, club or society in any country?**
- ◆ **Been a member of the Communist Party? Any other totalitarian party? A terrorist organization?**
- ◆ **Not filed your federal, state, or local taxes since becoming a permanent resident?**
- ◆ **Committed or attempted to commit a crime for which you were not arrested?**
- ◆ **Had a hereditary title or order of nobility in any foreign country?**

# “Moral Character” questions

- ◆ **Have you ever been:**
  - ◆ **A habitual drunkard?**
  - ◆ **A prostitute?**
  - ◆ **Married to more than one person at the same time?**
  - ◆ **Gambled illegally or received income from illegal gambling?**
  - ◆ **Failed to support your dependents or to pay alimony?**



# What happens if an Applicant Fails?

- ◆ Applicants are informed at the time of their first interview if they have passed and will be recommended for citizenship.
- ◆ If they do not pass any part of the test, they will go back for a second interview and retake only the part that they failed the first time.
- ◆ Applicants who do not pass the second time must start the process all over again...

# What Happens Next?

- ◆ **Applicants who pass the test will be scheduled for a public ceremony where they will take the Oath of Allegiance:**
- ◆ *"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."*

# New Citizens!



# Citizenship Resources: USCIS

USCIS Citizenship Resource Center website:

For teachers: lesson plans, activities, links

For students: interactive study materials

[USCIS Citizenship Resource Center](#)

Learn About the United States: *Quick Civics Lessons* USCIS

# Citizenship Resources

- ◆ From the LVCA Library:
  - ◆ Citizenship: Literacy Skills / Weintraub
  - ◆ Citizenship: Civics and Literacy / Weintraub
  - ◆ Citizenship: Ready for the Interview / Weintraub
- ◆ Catholic Legal Immigration Network's Guide
- ◆ LVCA booklet: Preparing for the U.S. Citizenship Interview

# Citizenship Resources

## USA Learns Citizenship Course

- Developed by the Sacramento County Office of Education with input from the USCIS
- Free
- Self-paced
- Covers all aspects of the test including steps to becoming a citizen, N-400 interview practice, civics (100 questions), and preparing for the interview
- Videos, quizzes, practice

# Final Questions and Comments

 *Thank you!*