

# DEMOCRACY IS...

## Understanding Our Rights and Responsibilities

The founders of our nation believed that all people are born with certain rights. In 1776, they wrote in the Declaration of Independence that “among these [rights] are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” They also wrote that the purpose of government is to secure, or protect, those rights. When a government fails to do this, they said, the people have the right to change their government and create a new one. This is what the 13 colonies did when they declared independence from Great Britain and formed the United States of America.

In our democracy, we have many other rights and freedoms. These include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to a fair trial if we are accused of a crime. Our rights are protected by the Bill of Rights, which is part of the Constitution (the plan of government created for the United States by the Founding Fathers more than 200 years ago).

When we exercise our rights, it often affects other people. This is why rights bring responsibilities. We must take care not to hurt other people or restrict their freedoms as a result of enjoying our own.

### THINK ABOUT IT

What does  
the right  
to liberty,  
or freedom,  
mean to you?

### YOUR TURN

What responsibilities  
come with your  
rights? Try the  
activity provided  
here to help you think  
about this.