



Portrait of a Citizen

University School of Milwaukee students understand citizenship to mean membership in a community. They learn that they are citizens of their classroom and school; their neighborhoods, state, and country; and their world. They learn, too, that a community can consist of any group of people who share something together.

At USM, we believe that good citizenship in any community happens when individuals are engaged, known, and valued in a community; understand that their participation in the community matters; feel a deep sense of responsibility for making the community stronger; and have the tools to help the community grow and become better. We ground our values of citizenship in our Common Trust—and its values of respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and kindness—which guides our behavior and actions both within and outside of our school community.

This notion of citizenship is present from the first day of school, when our entire community of students, families, and employees comes together for our opening day ceremony. After our seniors lead some of our youngest students, hand-in-hand, to the center of our campus, our senior Prefects share their reflections on one value of our Common Trust, anchoring our understanding of citizenship in our commitment to those shared principles. After our Lower School students lead the Pledge of Allegiance and our Middle School choir leads us in singing USM's Alma Mater, our longest-tenured employee then rings the school bell to kick off the year in community.

Our belief in citizenship and community is not just spoken about, but truly lived in cross-divisional events like March to the Memorials, Global Enrichment Festival, Homecoming pep rally, Senior Send-off, and countless other signature learning experiences. Read on to see how USM students cultivate their understanding of citizenship in each of our divisions.



Portrait of a Citizen: Preschool

USM Preschool students learn ...

- everyone belongs to several communities, such as their family, their classrooms, and their neighborhood.
- everybody within a community has differences and similarities.
- citizens follow agreements with each other so that they can get along, work together, and solve problems.
- cooperation among citizens helps communities be better.
- we must take care of ourselves and of the environments in which we live.
- all people, environments, and communities change over time.

USM Preschool students practice ...

- interacting with one another in ways that model the values of our Common Trust: respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and kindness.
- following community agreements that encourage safety and learning in classrooms, hallways, the dining room, and playgrounds.
- communicating individual needs and feelings with developmentally appropriate language.
- actively including others in learning and play.
- participating meaningfully in classroom routines such as morning meetings, announcements, and clean-up.

USM Preschool students experience ...

- daily morning meetings that establish peer-to-peer bonds, cultivate empathy, and reinforce communal agreements.
- classroom “buddies” from older grades, which help students recognize that they are part of a school community larger than their own classroom and grade.
- monthly assemblies focused on social-emotional learning.
- serving as a Wildcat Leader of the Day, getting practice with leadership responsibilities within a safe and familiar environment.
- field trips, such as transportation day, that highlight the diversity of Milwaukee and of “helping jobs” within their communities.



Portrait of a Citizen: Lower School

USM Lower School students learn ...

- citizens create and follow agreed-upon norms.
- the norms that communities create are often based on values that its members share and goals that they hope to achieve.
- governments and other organizational structures help lead communities and establish rules and laws for their people.
- each citizen of a community has some traits in common with other community members, and some traits that make them unique; all citizens find ways to be an individual within their community.
- there are many ways to help a community, and different citizens bring different and important ways of helping.

USM Lower School students practice ...

- engaging meaningfully in school and classroom rituals and routines that cultivate community and foster an appreciation of shared values.
- holding substantive jobs in their classrooms, developing a sense of responsibility for people and the environment.
- connecting not only with their grade-level classmates, but also with younger and older students.
- resolving conflict with increasing independence.
- learning and collaborating with peers who are similar and different from themselves.
- conducting research and learning about the importance of reliable sources as they seek to understand the world.
- identifying similarities and differences across cultures and time periods.

USM Lower School students experience ...

- mentoring a younger “buddy” at USM to practice caring for and teaching younger community members.
- daily dining with mixed-grade peers and USM faculty and staff, offering consistent opportunities to positively interact with diverse classmates and adults and to build community bonds.
- Random Acts of Kindness, an evidence-based, social-emotional curriculum that helps students forge deeper connections with their peers and teaches explicit lessons on kindness, empathy, and other values aligned with USM’s Common Trust.
- signature grade-level experiences, such as “traveling” to other countries in 1st grade—via pretend passports, imaginary plane rides, and immersive study—to learn about other cultures and to build a sense of global citizenship, and visiting Madison in 4th grade to study state and local government and to observe those systems firsthand.
- sharing their own family traditions and experiences through structures like morning meetings, as a way of celebrating the diversity within their class and learning about identities different from their own.
- collaborating with their grade to learn about and support a local or global cause.



Portrait of a Citizen: Middle School

USM Middle School students learn ...

- conflict and disagreement are inevitable within communities, and citizens benefit from structures and systems that help them resolve conflict and make decisions.
- the American government is one example of a structure which has evolved over time in how it provides its citizens with such systems.
- when agreements are broken within a community, citizens can support individuals within the community by being upstanders and using their voices.
- diversity is a positive feature of many communities, and different perspectives and ideas can help communities work better and solve problems together.
- many problems that communities face are complex, without a clear right or wrong answer.
- every community's past has shaped its present.

USM Middle School students practice ...

- applying their values about citizenship and community to digital spaces.
- reckoning with increasingly sophisticated understandings of fairness and inclusion across contexts.
- participating positively, listening actively, and disagreeing respectfully in discussions.
- taking responsibility for harm they have caused through restorative actions.
- exploring ways that individuals' personal identities, cultures, and experiences inform their values and beliefs.
- examining primary source materials from various perspectives.
- applying a critical lens to information sources and arguments.

USM Middle School students experience ...

- world language study grounded in oral proficiency and cross-cultural understanding.
- grade-level overnight retreats, which build community within the Middle School and help reinforce our bonds with one another based on USM's Common Trust.
- mentoring 4th grade students to help them prepare their Tower Projects, as a way of sharing their skills and giving back to the USM community.
- playing different roles in programming such as drama productions, athletics, visual arts experiences, and more, all of which teach students about what is possible when every person does their part in a community and within a team.
- Kindness Week, a series of activities led by our 8th grade students that encourage acts of kindness and displays of gratitude towards students, faculty, and staff.
- meaningful interaction with the broader Milwaukee community, through experiences such as the ofrenda exhibit in partnership with Latino Arts, to learn from external organizations and contribute to their programming.
- travel to Washington, D.C., as a culminating experience in 8th grade American History, to contextualize their learning about American government and citizenship.
- learning from outside speakers about historical topics, such as the Holocaust, that have shaped history and provided lessons about power dynamics and humanity's responsibility to others.



Portrait of a Citizen: Upper School

USM Upper School students learn ...

- membership in a community comes with rights and with responsibilities.
- citizens often feel a tension between their personal identity and their membership in a community.
- working to understand different ideas and perspectives can help citizens understand each other better, and can also help individuals clarify and solidify their own ideas and perspectives.
- different governments and civilizations, across the world and across time, have evolved from distinct peoples' ideas about how to structure and organize themselves.
- all citizens have some power within their community.

USM Upper School students practice ...

- making ethically responsible decisions within the framework of the Common Trust.
- expressing their voice through the election of Prefects, and following those Prefects' leadership in assemblies.
- adhering to protocols that communicate respect for school guests, fellow students, faculty and staff, and shared time.
- finding ways to contribute to the various communities in which they belong, whether through sustained positive participation, playing a leadership role, or committing their time and talents toward a cause.
- engaging in civil discourse and respectful disagreement through structures like the round table methodology used across English classes.
- using frameworks such as *Claim, Evidence, Reasoning* when expressing a viewpoint to facilitate a clear and productive exchange of ideas.
- questioning potential biases and motivations when consuming media.
- analyzing community, local, and global issues, and identifying ways to understand and engage with them.

USM Upper School students experience ...

- student-led forums on current events and topical issues, which provide time for students to grapple with intellectually challenging ideas, confront perspectives different from their own, and engage in civil discourse.
- diverse opportunities to shape and contribute to artistic, athletic, and cocurricular endeavors—whether through formal leadership roles, contribution of talents and expertise, or supportive participation—underlining the idea that meaningful engagement in shared enterprises takes many forms, all of which are necessary for communal progress.
- leadership roles within the Global Enrichment Festival, which showcases the diversity both within and outside of USM and enhances our community's capacity for global perspective.
- community service experiences at a range of local organizations.