

Table of Activities in the Unit

Part 1: The Social Contract (4 sessions)

Students consider their perceptions and understandings of law by responding to images and engaging in a fact-or-fiction exercise. They learn about the framing questions for the unit—the big ideas and concepts they will explore—and the importance of using research and evidence to support their reasoning. Students explore what life would be like without rules and examine social contract theories. They analyze ways in which the idea of a social contract can apply when working together in the classroom and in the workplace.

Activity 1A: It's the Law

Students view images of the law and choose one that best represents their own perceptions, then participate in a reflection on the framing questions for the unit.

Activity 1B: Disaster Scenario

Students participate in a disaster simulation that takes place after a nuclear holocaust and consider what life would be like without rules.

Activity 1C: The Nature of Human Nature

Students debrief the disaster simulation and discuss which social contract theorist was most accurate in his or her view of human nature and the need for rules. After connecting the concept of the need for rules to their school community, students are introduced to the unit project.

Activity 1D: Working in Teams

Students use their own experiences working in teams to analyze ways in which the benefits of a social contract can also apply when working together in the classroom. After exploring their working styles, students reflect on how their personal profile might affect team dynamics and the contributions they can make to a team.

Part 2: The Rule of Law (8 sessions)

Students explore the meaning of rights and how they are protected in the U.S. Bill of Rights. They analyze their school rules and the values represented in the rules, and discuss the relationship between rights, rules, and power. To build their understanding of the context for the rules of their school community, students compare the structure of the U.S. government to the legal structure in their school. Students learn how professionals contribute to creating, enforcing, and interpreting rules and laws.

Activity 2A: What's a Right?

Students consider what it means to have rights. Students analyze and discuss several scenarios in which rights conflict with the public good, then identify ways in which a social contract defines and limits personal liberties.

Activity 2B: To Write a Right

Students explore the purpose and content of the Bill of Rights and identify where and how specific rights are protected.

Activity 2C: Making the Rules at School

Students identify the individuals who make rules for the school community. Then, using school rules as a model, students analyze the specific values and assumptions embedded in a set of rules and laws.

Activity 2D: Writing the Rules

Students identify people and careers involved in writing laws, analyze the purpose of written laws, and identify ways that specific values and assumptions are embedded in some federal and state laws.

Activity 2E: Enforcing the Rules at School

Students identify the individuals who enforce the rules within their school community and analyze how different school communities have approached the enforcement of rules.

Activity 2F: Enforcing the Rules for a Nation

After identifying different functions of the executive branch, students share their perceptions of law enforcement and its role within the community, identify goals for modern law enforcement, and compare the professional and community models of policing.

Activity 2G: Interpreting the Rules at School

Students identify the individuals who interpret the rules within their school community and identify the role they play in the community, comparing their own school community to other school communities that have explored ways to integrate student voices into the process.

Activity 2H: Interpreting the Rules for a Nation

Students analyze how and why laws need to be interpreted once they are written down. Using the cases of *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* and *Safford v. Redding*, students identify how judicial review has changed the landscape of student privacy.

Part 3: Changing Rules and Laws (9 sessions)

After learning about the three branches of the U.S. government and identifying the checks and balances embedded in the U.S. legal system, students analyze methods that have been used historically to change unjust laws. Students learn about the notion of the *fourth branch*—advocacy—and explore the role of youth in influencing rules and laws. They identify one rule or policy affecting their school community that they believe needs to be changed or maintained. As they learn about persuasive writing techniques, they prepare an open letter to an individual or group in the school community who plays a role in making, enforcing, or interpreting the rules, making a case for a specific change or supporting a current rule or policy.

Activity 3A: Balance of Power Investigation

Students identify ways in which each component of the legal system may check the powers of the others, and compare the federal system to checks and balances in their own school community.

Activity 3B: Who Were “We the People”?

Students learn about the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution and explore the tensions between the ideal vision of democracy and real experiences of people. They explore how individuals and groups have historically been included or excluded from participation in the legal system by examining voting rights laws, past and present.

Activity 3C: Change and the Individual

Using a historic timeline of U.S. voting rights, students analyze how the struggle to earn voting rights evolved for different groups within the United States population, focusing on the specific strategies that everyday people and public advocates have used to enact changes to laws and to the Constitution.

Activity 3D: Effecting Changes in the School Community

After sharing ideas for changes in the school community or for upholding an existing rule, students identify specific actions that young people have taken to effect changes at the local, state, and national levels. They are introduced to their team roles and are provided with a structure for teams to conduct research on their chosen issue.

Activity 3E: Persuasive Arguments

Students compare persuasive writing to informational writing and identify ineffective and effective persuasive argument techniques. They work as a class to practice developing arguments, using a graphic organizer to clearly communicate their arguments on both sides of an issue.

Activity 3F: The Importance of Evidence

Students begin building their research skills by identifying specific types of evidence that may be used to support an argument. They brainstorm sources of evidence and conduct research as a class, using a classroom rule as a model. Small groups then begin independent research on their chosen issue.

Activity 3G: School Research

Students continue their independent research. In the process, they reflect on the types of evidence they have found and how the evidence shaped or informed their ideas for their letters.

Activity 3H: Writing Letters

Students analyze a sample letter advocating a change in classroom rules, and think about the arguments and supporting evidence illustrated in the letter. They apply what they learned about how to write an effective persuasive letter and begin composing their letters.

Activity 3I: Final Letters

Students use their Persuasion Maps to complete individual letters.

Part 4: The Power of Community (2 sessions)

Students share their letters with one another. They reflect on the understandings of law that they gained from the unit. Students consider if or how their thinking about their chosen issues changed as a result of research and discussion. They explore what roles they can play in the legal system as youth and as professionals in the future. Students complete self-assessments on teamwork skills and research skills—both of which are relevant to a range of careers.

Activity 4A: Final Reflections

Students share their letters—exploring what rules or changes were proposed and which letters were most effective. They revisit the notion of “we the people” and discuss student voice and empowerment. Students then reflect on the unit understandings and their own learning in this unit, and think about how the ideas they gained are relevant to careers in law and law enforcement.

Activity 4B: Portfolio Reflection and Unit Exam

Students complete self-assessments on key career skills addressed in the course. They also collect selected student work and handouts to include in their Career Portfolio. Students then complete the unit exam, which assesses their understanding of the framing questions and unit content.