Table of Activities in the Unit

Part 1: The Rule of Law (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 finding evidence through research 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: Making, Enforcing, and Interpreting Rules and Laws (8 sessions)

Students explore the meaning of rights and how they are protected in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They analyze their school rules and the values represented in those 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, and then identify ways in which a social contract defines and limits personal liberties.

Activity 2B: To Codify a Right

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

Activity 2C: Codifying Rules and Laws

Students identify people and careers involved in writing laws, analyze the purpose of written laws, identify ways that specific values and assumptions can be embedded in laws, and look closely at laws from other times and places.

Activity 2D: Making School Rules

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

Activity 2E: Enforcing the Rules of 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 2F: Enforcing School Rules

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 2G: Interpreting 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 decisions have affected a student’s right to be free from unreasonable searches.

Activity 2H: Interpreting School Rules

Students identify the individuals who interpret the rules within their school community and what role each one plays. They compare their own school community to others that have explored ways to integrate student voices into the school’s legal structure.
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 creating 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 play a role in creating, enforcing, or interpreting the rules, making a case for a specific change or supporting a current rule or policy.

Activity 3A: Examining the Balance of Power
Students identify ways in which each branch 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 to the U.S. Constitution and explore the tensions between the ideal vision of democracy and people’s actual experiences. 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 these rights evolved for different groups within the U.S. population, focusing on the specific strategies that everyday people, public advocates, and legal professionals 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 discuss how people in their school community perceive school rules and policies, and choose the rule or policy that will be the focus of the letter for their unit project.

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 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 the arguments and supporting evidence in a sample letter advocating a change in classroom rules. They apply what they have 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: Speaking Up (4 sessions)**
Students share their letters with one another. They reflect on the understanding of law they gained from the unit. Students consider if or how their thinking about their chosen issues changed as a result of their research and the class discussions. They explore what roles they can play in the legal system—both now, as youth, and in the future, as professionals. Students complete self-assessments on their teamwork and research skills and take the unit exam.

**Activity 4A: Share Letters**
Students share their letters—exploring what rules or changes were proposed and which letters were most persuasive. They revisit the notion of “we the people” and discuss the role of student voice in school and in the U.S. legal system.

**Activity 4B: Final Reflections**
Students 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 the legal and criminal justice systems.

**Activity 4C: Portfolio Reflection**
Students complete self-assessments on the key skills addressed in this course, and select work and handouts to include in their Career Portfolio.

**Activity 4D: Unit Exam**
Students complete the unit exam, which assesses their understanding of the framing questions and unit content.