

## SOCIAL CONTRACTS

In this activity, you will apply social contract theory to your home, classroom, or club.

This lesson teaches you about self-government by using the social contract theory to analyze a class, family, or club membership contract. You should review your membership agreements with a lens on the danger of the tyranny of the majority, the meaning of consent, and the issue of how to enforce your contract with your teacher, family, or club. At the end of the exercise, you will have learned the basics of social contract theory and the need to understand the agreements, rights, and responsibilities of each community you engage with and how these are different, depending on the type of ruling structure.

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Read the short paragraph on social contract theory:

Social contract theory is a political philosophy about making an agreement between the people and their government. The idea is that when this contract is made it spells out the defined rights and duties of each party to the agreement. Influential Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke came up with the ideas behind this theory. Under social contract theory, Locke and his fellow theorists explained that in the earliest years people were born in a state of nature, where they had total freedom but very little safety and security. To increase their safety and security, they built communities and moved from a state of nature into a civil society. They joined with one another for the benefit of everyone. But to live together in peace, they needed to establish rules and set up a government. In the end, they formed a government with limited powers and temporary control over some rights. In return, the government had a duty to provide greater security and safety. The critical insight is that all legitimate forms of government are based on the consent of the people; the people give away certain powers to the government, but the people can always take that power back. So, if the government fails to hold up its end of the contract, the people have the right to alter or abolish it. This theory was central to the American Revolution.

## CONSTITUTION 101

Module 2: Principles of the American Revolution  
2.7 Extended Activity

Complete the following chart that lists your right **as a student** and what your responsibilities are:

Rights as a Student	Responsibilities

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Complete the following chart that lists your right **at your home or in a club you joined** and what your responsibilities are:

Rights as a Student	Responsibilities

Compare your rights and responsibilities at school with your home or your club.

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Similarities	Differences

