



EduTrend Contents

P4C · SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY · HIGH SCHOOL

The Social Contract

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau on why we have society

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

60 minutes

Circle and pairs · up to
30

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

The Social Contract

Students imagine a world with no government, which philosophers call the state of nature. Thomas Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* (1651) that life there would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”, so people agree to obey a ruler. John Locke argued that people form governments to protect their rights. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote of a general will of the people. Students compare the theories and enquire into why we should accept society’s rules.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain three social contract theories;
- compare views of the state of nature;
- evaluate objections;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

social contract · state of nature · Hobbes · Locke · Rousseau · authority

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: political philosophy.
History: revolutions and constitutions. Citizenship: rights.

1**STIMULUS**

Share something to think about

2**THINK**

Quiet thinking time

3**QUESTION**

Create and choose a question

4**ENQUIRE**

Reason together

5**BUILD**

Agree, disagree, add

6**REFLECT**

Last words

Materials (per class)

- State of nature card
- Theory cards
- Question and thinking-move cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Read the stimulus and note possible concepts.
- Prepare question and thinking-move cards.
- Set out a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Print the worksheets.

SAFETY

Everyone may pass. Discuss ideas, not people, and use the story or invented examples rather than personal situations.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Stay neutral: ask for reasons, examples and counter-examples rather than giving your own view.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Stimulus	Describe the state of nature and the three theories.	<i>"What did you notice?"</i>
10–22 min Questions	Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.	<i>"Which question is most interesting to talk about?"</i>
22–52 min Enquiry	Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other's ideas.	<i>"Why should we accept society's rules?"</i>
52–60 min Last words	Each person says one last thought or passes.	<i>"Has your thinking changed?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Defend a view on why we should accept society's rules.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Social contract theories explain political authority as resting on some kind of agreement among the people.

A common objection is that most people never actually agreed to anything, so theorists appeal to tacit or hypothetical consent.

Common ideas to listen for

- “The social contract is a real document.” It is a theory.
- “Hobbes wanted people to be unhappy.” He wanted peace and security.
- “All three theories say the same.” They differ sharply.

Adapting the activity

Support

Compare Hobbes and Locke.

Stretch

Write a social contract for a new island community.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Three theories

Compare.

Three theories

Thinker	State of nature	Why government?
Hobbes		
Locke		
Rousseau		

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

**Did anyone ever agree to the social contract? Before the enquiry I thought...
Now I think... because...**

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Asks a philosophical question	Gives reasons and examples	Listens and builds on others

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

The Social Contract is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Society and Community programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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