

Theme and Thesis Statements

Rights and Responsibilities 2025

TEACHER GUIDE

AUDIENCE

Grades 4-12

TIME

80 minutes (or two 40-minute blocks)

STANDARDS

Social Studies: Grade 4:

C.S. 1, C.S. 2, C.S. 15,

C.S. 16, C.S. 17, C.S. 18

Grade 5: C.S. 1, C.S. 11

Grade 6: C.S. 9, C.S. 12

Grade 7: C.S. 1, C.S. 16

Grade 8: C.S. 1, C.S. 20,

C.S. 22, C.S. 23

American History: C.S. 1,

C.S. 2, C.S. 3, C.S. 4, C.S.

6

American Government:

C.S. 3, C.S. 6, C.S. 8, C.S.

10, C.S. 11, C.S. 14, C.S.

15

Modern World History:

C.S. 1, C.S. 2, C.S. 3

Contemporary World

Issues: C.S. 8, C.S. 9, C.S.

10

English Language Arts:

Grades 3-5: R.L. 4.1, R.L.

5.1, R.I. 4.1, R.I. 5.1, R.I.

4.2, R.I. 5.2, R.I. 4.3, R.I.

5.3, W. 4.2, W.5.2

Grades 6-8: R.L. 6.1, R.L.

7.1, R.L. 8.1, R.I. 6.1, R.I.

7.1, R.I. 8.1, R.I. 6.2, R.I.

7.2, R.I. 8.2, R.I. 6.3, R.I.

7.3, R.I. 8.3, W.6.2, W.7.2,

W.8.2

Grades 9-10: R.L. 9-10.1,

R.I. 9-10.1, R.I. 9-10.2,

R.I. 9-10.3, W.9-10.2

Grades 11-12: R.L. 11-

12.1, R.I. 11-12.1, R.I. 11-

12.2, R.I. 11-12.3, W.11-

12.2

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Introduction

In this lesson plan, students will unpack the 2025 National History Day theme of *Rights and Responsibilities in History*. Students will walk away from this lesson with an understanding of the difference between a right and responsibility, how these ideas are interconnected, and have brainstormed topic ideas. The lesson will help students to think through how a topic that interests them can demonstrate this theme and will begin to build out the backbone of their History Day project: their thesis statement.

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand the definition of a right and be able to name examples of rights.
- Students will understand the definition of a responsibility and be able to name examples of responsibilities.
- Students will brainstorm ideas for research topics that connect to the theme of Rights and Responsibilities.
- Students will be able to identify the parts that make up a strong thesis statement.

Materials

- Teacher guide
- [NHD Theme Video](#)
- 2025 Rights and Responsibilities Notetaking
- 2025 Rights and Responsibilities Theme Graphic Organizer
- 2025 Rights and Responsibilities Theme Graphic Organizer TEACHER GUIDE
 - Versions for grades 6-12 and Youth History Day (Grades 4 & 5)

Vocabulary

Rights	Freedoms or privileges that individuals possess as human beings or as citizens of a society
Responsibilities	Expectations of individuals as members of society
Theme	The main subject being discussed or described
Thesis Statement	The central or main idea of a research project that identifies a claim about a topic

Program Outline

Pre-Activity 1: NHD Theme Overview

- I. Announce to your class that you will be beginning a project that combines social studies, research, reading, and writing to create an end product of their choice to showcase their learning. You can mention the options for their end product here (Paper, Exhibit, Documentary, Website, or Performance). The National History Day project has many levels of competition, and all students compete using the same theme and rubrics. The theme for this year's project is Rights and Responsibilities. Tell students they will be learning more about this theme by viewing the Theme Video. Have students listen to be able to answer these two questions:
 - What is a right?
 - What is a responsibility?
- II. Play the video for students. <https://vimeo.com/953644604?share=copy> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUyY5OkYW74> (9:48). Pause the video at 2:53. Have students share out what they learned to be a right and responsibility.
- III. Continue playing the video and listen to the examples NHD has provided from history.

Discussion: What are rights and responsibilities? How do they connect?

- A. Ask your students how they think rights and responsibilities connect.
 - Rights allow individuals to enjoy freedoms and protections, while responsibilities ensure these freedoms are exercised in a way that maintains order, respects others, and promotes the well-being of the community.
 - In an ideal, balanced society rights and responsibilities work together to build a place where we live harmoniously. However, most societies are ever evolving and require citizens to recognize their human and ethical responsibility to fight for rights yet to be guaranteed.
- B. Hold a discussion about some of the open-ended questions posed in the video. These are meant to get students thinking and will not have "right" answers.
 - Who gets to decide who has rights?
 - Do all people have the same rights?
 - Why were certain rights created, to whom were they given, and why?
 - Who is responsible for holding people accountable for providing and ensuring the established rights?

Pre-Activity 2: Examples of Rights and Responsibilities in History

- I. Pass out the 2025 Rights and Responsibilities Notetaking sheet. Use this worksheet to facilitate a conversation about the different kinds of rights and responsibilities. We suggest reviewing each type of right/responsibility's definition and coming up with an example from history as a class.
- II. You have the option to then let students work independently or with a partner to come up with a second example for each.
 - a. It is important to note that the charge for students from NHD is to ensure that they address both rights and responsibilities in their projects; however, students are not required to specify what type of right or responsibility is included in their topic. This activity is meant to help students brainstorm a wide



range of topics based on the variety of types of rights and responsibilities. Some topics will fit into more than one category of right or responsibility.

- b. Example: The Summer Freedom project demonstrates how citizens felt an ethical and human responsibility to fight for civil rights in Mississippi. This example in history could fit in many categories of rights and responsibilities.

(If choosing to break this lesson into two days, STOP here.)

Main Activity: Brainstorming Topics and Thesis Statements

- I. Pass out the 2025 Rights and Responsibilities Theme Graphic Organizer. Use the Teacher Guide example to walk students through filling out the top section of the organizer.
 - a. Theme: Rights and Responsibilities
 - b. General Topic/Interest:
 - c. Narrow Topic:
- II. Give students time to brainstorm as many Narrow Topic ideas as possible. Encourage students to think about P.I.E.s (People, Places, Ideas, and Events) connected to their General Topic/Interest.
- III. In the boxes on the back of the organizer, the goal is for students to select ONE Narrow topic idea and think through how the topic is connected to both rights and responsibilities. Emphasize that rights do not always beget responsibilities. In other words, it is not necessarily an A leads to B relationship with rights leading to responsibilities. The arrows on the organizer are meant to help symbolize the complicated relationship between rights and responsibilities.
- IV. Review with students the importance of a thesis statement. The thesis statement will be the road map for their entire project. As the NHD theme this year is two parts (rights and responsibilities), it will be extra important for students to select a narrow topic that addresses each part.
- V. Use the thesis statement on the Teacher Guide as an example to show students how to include background information, rights, responsibilities, immediate impact, and long-term significance. The students have space to work on brainstorming these parts for their own topic idea as well.
- VI. Encourage students to take their time with this process. They might even try out multiple narrow topic ideas before landing on one that they like best.



Rights & Responsibilities Notetaking




Rights are freedoms or privileges that individuals possess as human beings or as citizens of a society.



Responsibilities are expectations of individuals as members of society.

<u>Rights:</u>		<u>Responsibilities</u>	
<p>Civil rights: nonpolitical rights of individuals that their governments (through law) are bound to protect. They can include-Freedom of speech, religion, assembly, petition, press.</p>	Example:	<p>Legal responsibilities: the duty to maintain order and justice within a society. They include obeying the law, paying taxes, and respecting the rights of others. By following the laws, societies can function, and the rights of others are protected.</p>	Example:
<p>Political rights: the rights of citizens to participate in their government. They can include the right to vote, run for public office, and participate in the process. Political rights ensure that citizens have a say in how they are governed.</p>	Example:	<p>Civic responsibilities: the obligation to participate (directly or indirectly) in the functioning of a government. They can include voting, staying informed about political issues, and engaging in community activities.</p>	Example:

<p><u>Social rights:</u> the rights that establish a basic standard of living and well-being for all members of society. Social rights can include the right to an education, safe housing, or access to social services such as health care, access to food, and care for children or the elderly.</p>	<p>Example:</p>	<p><u>Social responsibilities:</u> the commitment to treat others respectfully and kindly and to help those in need. Examples include volunteering in the community or establishing organizations that support others.</p>	<p>Example:</p>
<p><u>Economic rights:</u> the rights that allow people to participate in their economy. These can include the right to own property, work, and earn fair wages. They can also include the right to pursue a career of one's choosing, to start a business, or enjoy fair and safe working conditions.</p>	<p>Example:</p>	<p><u>Ethical responsibilities:</u> the charge to make morally sound choices and decisions—even when driven by personal values and principles rather than being demanded by law—and making decisions between right and wrong.</p>	<p>Example:</p>
<p><u>Human rights:</u> the rights that apply to all individuals, no matter who governs them. They are considered universal because they belong to everyone regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other identities or affiliations. These rights are inalienable because they cannot be withdrawn, surrendered, or transferred. They are most famously defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in December 1948. This document affirms the right of every person to life, a fair justice system, and access to the resources of the community.</p>	<p>Example:</p>	 <p>The graphic features three interlocking gears. The top-left gear is red and labeled 'RIGHTS'. The bottom-right gear is green and labeled 'RESPONSIBILITIES'. A smaller pink gear is positioned between them, labeled 'IN HISTORY'. The gears are surrounded by curved arrows indicating a cycle or interconnectedness.</p>	

Theme & Thesis Graphic Organizer



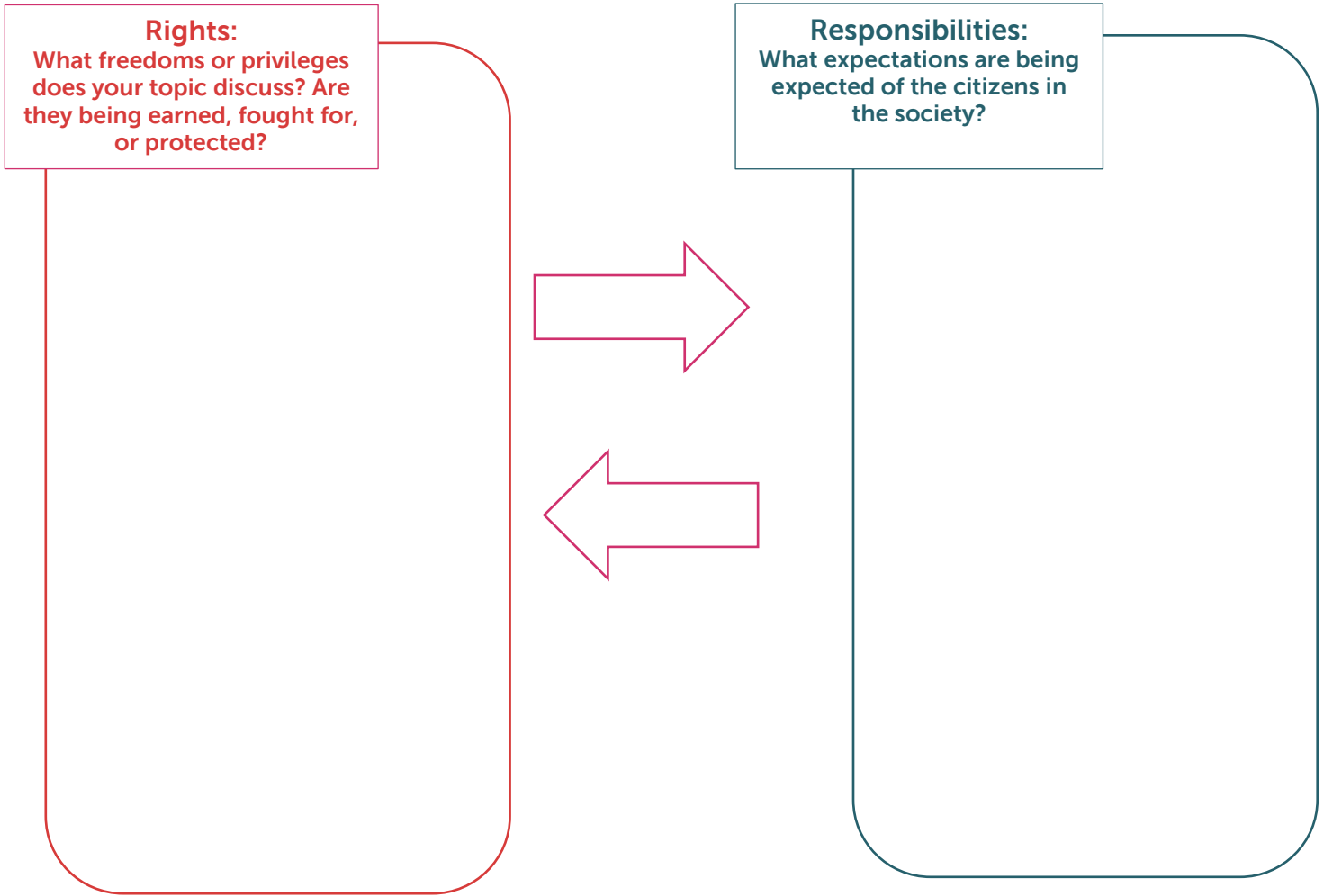
Theme: _____

General Topic/Interest: _____

Narrow Topic(s): _____



Circle a narrow topic that you would like to explore rights and responsibilities of further. Consider there are many different types of rights and responsibilities for each topic. Be sure that your topic addresses both rights and responsibilities by completing this graphic organizer. Do the rights lead to responsibilities or is it the responsibility of the citizens/societies to uphold rights?



Your thesis statement should include:

background topic/theme words → rights responsibilities immediate impact long-term significance

The Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union began with the launch of Sputnik in 1957. With the race to the moon heating up, the United Nations developed the Outer Space Treaty which establishes rules for peaceful use and exploration of space. The United States agreed to this treaty in 1967, two years prior to Apollo 11. While the US felt a civic responsibility to getting to the moon first, they recognized the importance of sharing the rights to space. **The Outer Space Treaty is still used today.**

Thesis Statement Draft:

Background:

Rights:

Responsibilities:

Immediate Impact:

Long-Term Significance:

Theme Organizer Teacher Guide



Theme: _____Rights and Responsibilities_____

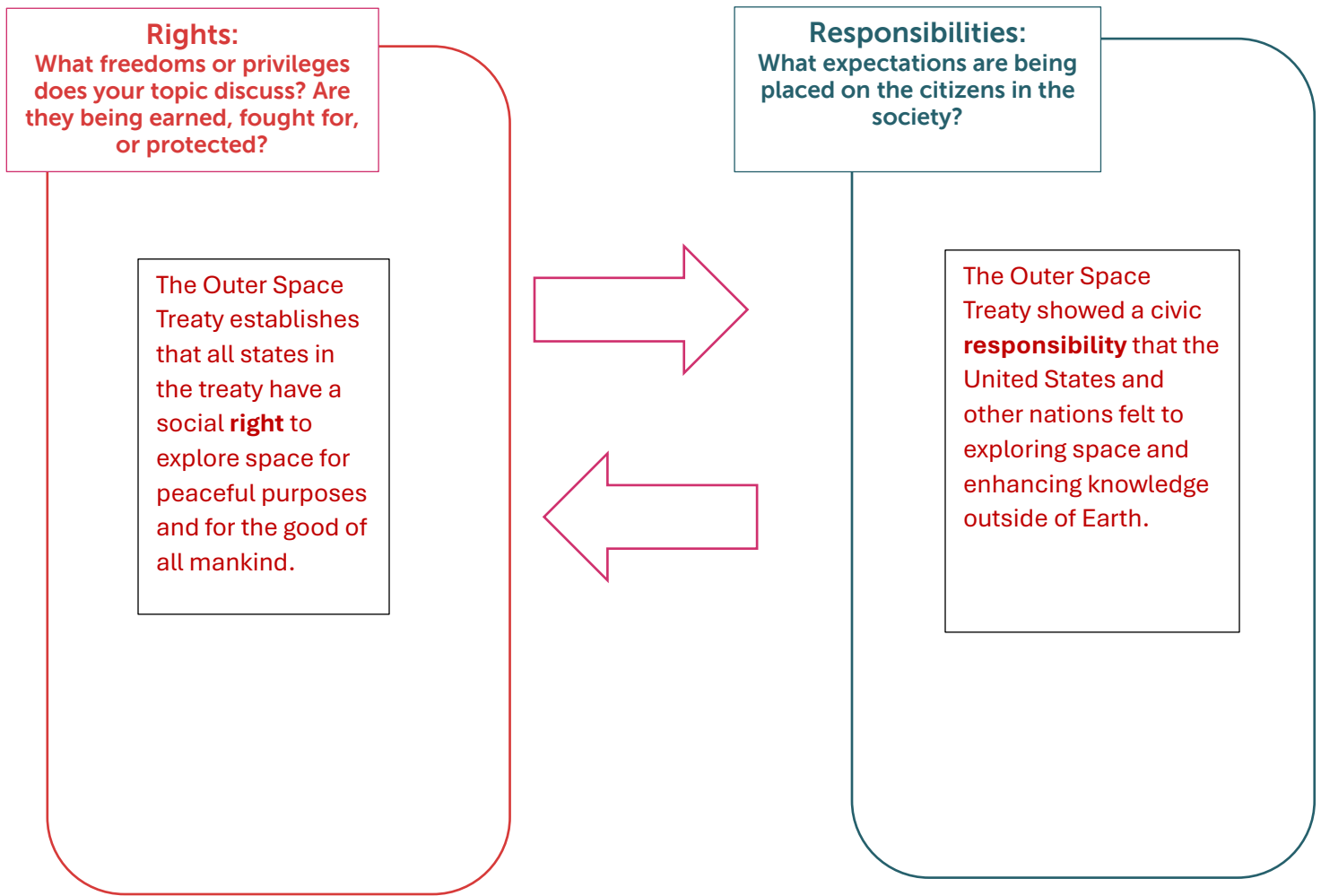
General Topic/Interest: Space Race

Narrow Topic(s): Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong, The Outer Space Treaty

Rights are freedoms or privileges that individuals possess as human beings or as citizens of a society. (Civil, political, social, economic, human, etc.)

Responsibilities are expectations of individuals as members of society. (Legal, civic, social, ethical, etc.)

Circle a narrow topic that you would like to explore rights and responsibilities of further. Consider there are many different types of rights and responsibilities for each topic. Be sure that your topic addresses both rights and responsibilities by completing this graphic organizer. Do the rights lead to responsibilities or is it the responsibility of the citizens/societies to uphold rights?



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Thesis Statement Draft:

Background:

Rights:

Responsibilities:

Immediate Impact:

Long-Term Significance:

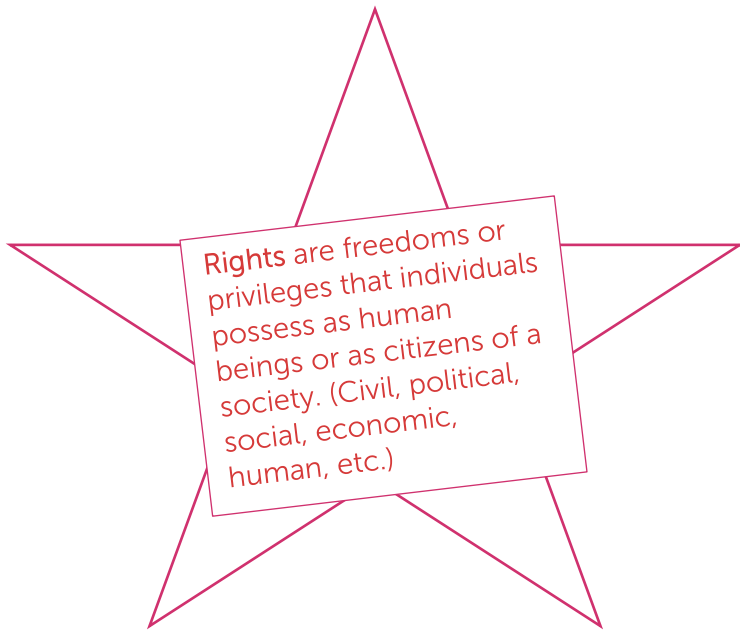
Youth History Day- Theme Organizer Teacher Guide



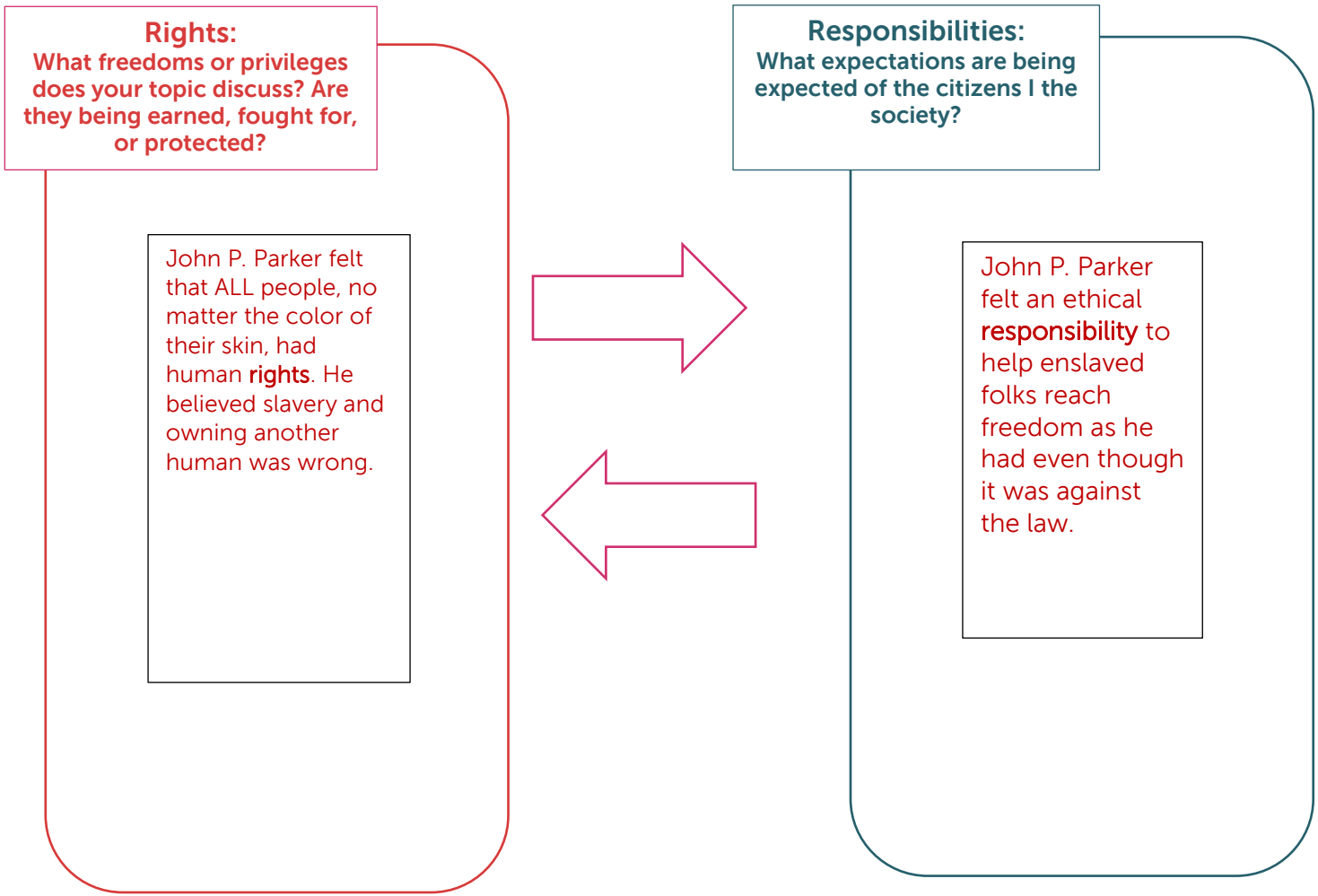
Theme: Rights and Responsibilities

General Topic/Interest: The Underground Railroad

Narrow Topic(s): Harriet Tubman, Fugitive Slave Law, Benjamin Lundy, John P. Parker



Circle a narrow topic that you would like to explore rights and responsibilities of further. Consider there are many different types of rights and responsibilities for each topic. Be sure that your topic addresses both rights and responsibilities by completing this graphic organizer. Do the rights lead to responsibilities or is it the responsibility of the citizens/societies to uphold rights?



Your thesis statement should include:

background topic/theme words → rights responsibilities immediate impact long-term significance

In the 1850's when there was great debate over the use of slavery in the United States, conductors, like John P. Parker, on the Underground Railroad risked everything to help enslaved folks on their path to freedom. Conductors say it as their responsibility to help freedom seekers gain rights promised to white Americans. An estimated 100,000 people escaped on the Underground Railroad between 1820 and 1861.

Thesis Statement Draft:

Background:

Rights:

Responsibilities:

Immediate Impact:

Long-Term Significance: