

Teacher Guide: Would You Sign?

Background: Originally drafted in Boston in 1774, the Solemn League and Covenant was an agreement to boycott imported British goods in retaliation against the Coercive Acts, a set of punitive laws put in place by Great Britain and deemed the “Intolerable Acts” by colonists. Those who signed the non-importation pledge promised to stop purchasing British goods, but also to cease business dealings with those who continued. This agreement eventually spread beyond Boston to surrounding communities such as Concord.

Activity: This lesson is designed to encourage students to think critically about the challenges that the colonists faced in deciding whether to remain loyal to the King or to rebel against the British government. Students should be reminded that at this time, colonists did not yet think of themselves as Americans, but still considered themselves to be British. This may prompt students to think about issues of identity, and what might have been challenging or scary about rebelling against their own country. It may also be productive for students to consider their own experiences with boycotts or bans.

While this activity may be used as independent work, it can also work well as the topic for a class debate. If you choose to set this activity up as a debate, you can assign students to be either Patriots (affirmative) or Tories (negative), and have each group come up with arguments either for or against signing the covenant.

**A full version of the Solemn League and Covenant is located at the Concord Free Public Library.*

Name: _____

Would You Sign?

In June of 1774, the citizens of Concord compiled the Solemn League and Covenant, a document which expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of Great Britain, and announced a boycott of all imported British goods. Read the excerpt below and think about whether or not you would choose to sign this document if you were a Concord citizen in 1774. Use the accompanying list of consequences for each scenario to help you.

We, the subscribers, inhabitants of the town of Concord, having taken into our serious consideration the precarious state of liberties of North America...and conscious...of no alternative...but a suspension of all commercial intercourse with the island of Great Britain: do in the presence of God, solemnly, and in good faith, covenant and engage with each other,

1st...we will suspend all commercial intercourse with...Great Britain...And,

2nd ...we do...solemnly covenant, that we will not buy, purchase, or consume...any goods...which shall arrive in America from Great Britain...

3rd...we further agree to purchase no article of merchandize from them, or any of them, who shall not have signed this, or a similar covenant...

If You Sign	If You Do Not Sign
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may not buy or sell British goods such as tea, coffee, and textiles • You alienate the new Governor of Massachusetts who has been sent to the colonies by the King • You cannot receive a Crown-appointed job such as being a lawyer or judge • You believe this firm message to Parliament could prevent a war 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You jeopardize your business relations with Boston suppliers and/or customers • You risk finding your name listed in the newspaper as a boycott violator • You might anger your neighbors who are following the boycott • You believe that your loyalty belongs to the Crown



Thinking Critically

Imagine that you are a citizen of Concord in 1774 and are trying to decide whether or not you would sign the Solemn League and Covenant. Consider not just how your actions might affect your own life, but that of your family or business. Think about both the positive and negative consequences for each choice, and explain your decision-making process below.