Contribution & Benefits

**Contribution:** To discover your passions and talents, and to use them to create what is beautiful and needed. To work hard to take care of yourself and those who depend on you.

1. Name someone who is really good at something, who works hard at it, and whose work creates something that is beautiful, needed, or beneficial to others. This might include either tangible or intangible benefits. For example, excellent filmmakers, actors, and comedians contribute valuable thoughtfulness, beauty, and levity to our culture in many ways.

2. How does the third criteria (creates something beautiful, needed, or beneficial to others) affect how easy or difficult it is for you to respond to the question?

3. How do other people benefit from that person's skill, passion, and hard work (or contribution)?

Complete the following information about that person, to the best of your knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talent/Skill/Trait</td>
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Write a statement about this person's contribution to society:

With your small group: Report to your group as follows:

If the person you have identified is known to the others in your group, describe the person and his or her skills and contribution to society and let the group guess who it is. If the person is not known, name the person and report on what you have noted about that person. Discuss your responses to questions 1 through 3.

Compare the statements you wrote in the bottom row of your tables. Discuss similar themes and write a statement that sums up the ways society has benefitted from the contributions of the people named by members of your group. Write that statement below:

Select one person from your group who will share that statement with the class.
Our Contributions: Who Benefits?

My Name: _______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talent/Skill/Trait</th>
<th>Priorities/Passions</th>
<th>Benefit to Others</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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______________________________’s contribution to our class / our school / our community:

What is my “contribution”?

When I discover my passions and talents and use them to create what is beautiful and needed, and when I work hard to take care of myself and those who depend on me.

Refer to this completed handout when you complete the “Contribution” journal prompt later in this chapter.
CONTRIBUTION
The Schechter Brothers

The year was 1934, and Joseph, Martin, Alex, and Aaron Schechter found themselves in jail. The four brothers were businessmen who operated two poultry butcher shops in Brooklyn, New York. As observant Jews, their butcher shops were kosher and adhered to the Jewish laws of kashruth. Swindling customers, committing fraud, and embezzlement—these are a few of the crimes that normally send a businessperson to prison. The Schechter brothers, however, were not in jail for such dishonest behavior. Rather, they were penalized for offering safe, reliable merchandise to their customers.

During the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, many who wielded political power were afraid that if businesses competed too much, the prices of their goods would stay too low. They thought that if the prices of goods and services were too low, incomes would also remain low. As part of the New Deal, Congress passed legislation called the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which they believed would help the faltering economy recover and grow. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was an agency established by the Roosevelt Administration to craft a multitude of codes and regulations for different industries to tell them how they should conduct their affairs in order to keep competition low and prices high. The NRA was also tasked with making sure that all of these regulations and codes were followed. The goal of these new agencies and regulations was to prevent “unfair competition.”

The codes governing businesses were minute and specific. The one that applied to the Schechter brothers was called the “Code of Fair Competition for the Live Poultry Industry of the Metropolitan Area in and About the City of New York.” This code so strictly regulated the operations of the Schechter brothers’ butcher shops that it required them to violate some laws of kashruth that, as a kosher establishment, they were morally bound to uphold.

The laws of kashruth were concerned with more than dietary standards alone. They also ensured that the animals being dealt with were treated humanely and that no animal would pose a health risk to consumers. One of these customs, for example, required that the Schechter brothers perform inspections of the birds’ lungs to prevent unhealthy poultry from being sold to customers. Similarly, the customers themselves could also inspect the birds and reject any that seemed unfit to purchase. This double inspection helped ensure that the customer was purchasing healthy poultry. One of the NRA codes, however, specified that no customer could choose or refuse individual birds; customers could purchase the birds only in whole- or half-coop units. This meant that, by law, customers were not allowed to check the chickens’ lungs for signs of tuberculosis. The Schechter brothers’ own internal inspection process—which was one reason many in the community chose to buy chicken from them—was now illegal.

Image courtesy the Granger Collection
When the government regulations forced the Schechter brothers to violate the requirements of their Jewish tradition, the quality and safety of their products were compromised. Understandably, they lost a number of their devout Jewish customers. Those customers lost the benefits that came with the Schechters’ contribution to the community, as they had one less business from which to choose.

The Schechter brothers’ poultry shops underwent numerous inspections by the National Recovery Administration in 1934, and eventually they were taken to court for multiple violations of the NRA codes. Ironically, one of the violations cited against them was selling “unfit” poultry. They were accused of allowing customers to select their own chickens, refusing inspections by regulators, and selling chickens to unlicensed purchasers. Other accusations included “competing too hard” and keeping prices “too low.” The brothers were found guilty and sentenced to serve a short time in prison.

The Schecher brothers knew that they had been providing a safe and affordable product to their customers. They believed the government had stepped outside its constitutional boundaries and not only prevented them from adhering to their Jewish traditions and doing their jobs well, but penalized them for it. The four Schechter brothers and their lawyer persevered. Their fight did not make them popular. Politically-connected competitors who wanted to drive them out of business tried to intimidate them. The brothers even found their truck damaged and vandalized on one occasion.

But the Schechters’ determination eventually propelled their case, A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corporation v. United States, to the Supreme Court. In 1935, the Supreme Court decided in favor of the Schechter brothers and ruled that the National Industrial Recovery Act was unconstitutional. The Court reasoned that Congress had gone too far in delegating (or assigning) its lawmaking power to the President. The National Recovery Act did not make regulations; it simply empowered the President to do so. This violated the Constitution’s separation of powers.

The Court also held that many of the rules, regulations, and codes put in place by the NRA were beyond the limits of what the national government could constitutionally regulate. While the Commerce Clause permits Congress to regulate interstate commerce, the Schechter brothers’ business operated only within New York. Congress had stepped outside its constitutional bounds. Not a single justice dissented.

—JANDI HEAGEN
Bill of Rights Institute

**Defining Civic Virtues: Contribution**

To discover your passions and talents, and to use them to create what is beautiful and needed. To work hard to take care of yourself and those who depend on you.
1. Note the definition of “contribution” as a civic virtue that follows the **Contribution: Schechter Brothers** narrative. Describe the various ways the Schechter brothers **contributed** to their communities.

2. With what crimes were they charged?

3. Describe your reaction to learning of the crimes with which they were charged. What does your instinctive response reveal about whether what happened to the Schechter brothers was right or wrong? How does this affect your ideas about whether an objective right and wrong exist?

4. How do contributions like those that the Schechter brothers made to their community, when multiplied by many citizens around the country, contribute to society in general?


6. Which of the following might constitute “unfair competition”? Explain.
   - Remaining open on Sundays when most other businesses are closed (because your religion’s Sabbath is on a different day).
   - Keeping labor costs down so your prices stay low as well—lower than those of your competitors.
   - Secretly agreeing with one of your competitors not to lower prices below a certain level.
   - Stealing from your distributors.
   - Bribing an employee at your rival’s soup company to give you his secret recipes.
   - Others?

7. One scholar notes that, at the time the Schechter brothers’ case was being heard in court, much of the coverage of the case was biased against them: “[c]overage of the case … was highly tinged with the standard anti-Semitism of the time, especially because the Schechters were … immigrants with their Eastern European cadences and traditional Jewish dress.” How does this information help you understand this historical event?

8. How do the Schechter brothers’ actions help you understand **contribution** as a civic virtue? Given the economic conditions of the time, how could many other individuals like the Schechter brothers contribute to the social fabric of the whole United States?

10. Explain how the level of freedom in a society relates to a person's ability to maximize his or her *contribution* to society.

11. Why might the U.S. Founders have believed that this virtue was essential in a constitutional republic?

12. Given the unprecedented crisis of the Great Depression, would it have been more or less virtuous for the Schechter brothers to set aside their personal religious beliefs in order to obey laws that were meant to improve economic conditions for all? Explain.

13. *Take a stand:* Whose *contribution* to society was greater during the Great Depression: the National Recovery Administration or individuals like the Schechter brothers? Whatever your response, be prepared to defend it based on historical facts.

14. Think about your own interests and talents. How do you use them to make a contribution to your family and community?
Discover your passions and talents, and use them to create what is beautiful and needed. Work hard to take care of yourself and those who depend on you.

- Work hard to develop your natural talents. It’s important to have a broad base of knowledge, but focus on developing skills where you can make a special contribution.
  - Make a list of all the things you enjoy doing.
  - Go through that list and determine the ones you are already good at, or in which you could truly excel.
  - Of those, make a plan to develop some into courses of study or a career, and develop some into hobbies.
  - This school year, use this list to help you plan to make a special contribution to improve your school.

- Take an inventory of the ways you contribute to your family’s welfare. Broaden that list to include all those who depend on you in other ways. Finally, broaden it to include people who may depend on you in the future, including possibly a spouse and children. What are some ways you can and will uniquely contribute to take care of those people?

Sources & Further Reading


Contribution

Vocation is a strong desire to spend your life doing a certain kind of work. Contribution is when you use your passions and talents to create something beautiful and needed in the world and work hard to take care of yourself and those who depend on you.

Directions  Read the quotation below, then choose an area of your life in which you work hard and (generally) enjoy doing so. Describe a way that this could possibly become a vocation in which your passions meet some need in the world. It may or may not be humanitarian. Remember: the Schechter brothers’ contribution was a business that met an important need for their neighbors.

“Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”

–FREDERICK BUECHNER