

Date Reviewed

February 2023

Course

[Social Studies 8](#)

Topic

The Enlightenment and Natural Rights

Big Idea

Changing ideas about the world created tension between people wanting to adopt new ideas and those wanting to preserve established traditions.

Essential Question

How do the ideas of the Enlightenment continue to influence us today?

Learning Standards**Content:**

Students are expected to know the following:

- Philosophical and cultural shifts

Curricular Competencies

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Characterize different time periods in history, including periods of progress and decline, and identify key turning points that mark periods of change (continuity and change)

Core Competencies

[Communication](#) - I can describe natural rights.

[Thinking](#) - I can determine the most significant change that resulted from the Enlightenment.

[Personal and Social](#) - I can explain how the ideas of the Enlightenment affect me today.

First People's Principles of Learning

Learning requires the exploration of one's identity.

Introduction

- Designate two areas in the room—one with an “Agree” sign and one with a “Disagree” sign.
- Provide an Agree/Disagree Statements handout to each student and give them a few minutes to complete.
- Read each agree/disagree statement aloud to the class.
- After each statement, ask students to quietly move to stand under the “Agree” or “Disagree” sign depending on their opinion.
- Ask for 2-3 volunteers from each perspective to explain their choices.
- When applicable, prompt students to respectfully respond to their classmates with competing viewpoints.

Pre-Assessment

- Have students show what they already know about the Enlightenment by completing the first column of the Enlightenment 5 W Chart and then work in with a small group to complete the second column of the Enlightenment 5 W Chart.

Interactive Learning Activities

Part 1: Introduction to the Enlightenment

- Show the first 1 minute 30 seconds of the BBC [video](#) *Heroes of the Enlightenment, Episode 2* (0:00-1:30).
- Have students use a [Think-Pair-Share](#) strategy to respond to the following questions:
 - What had the most influence on how people in Europe lived and what they thought?
 - What changes came about as a result of the Enlightenment?
 - How do the ideas of the Enlightenment continue to influence us today?
- Explain that the Enlightenment was a time of new ideas about people’s rights and the government’s responsibilities.
- Have students use a [Think-Pair-Share](#) strategy to respond to the following questions:
 - What are the government’s responsibilities to the people it governs?
 - What rights do you value the most?
- Provide students with the Enlightenment Backgrounder and have them revisit their 5 W Chart and add new ideas as they read the Backgrounder.
- Provide students with the Enlightenment Writers Venn and have them work with a partner to compare the ideas of Locke, Rousseau, and Wollstonecraft.

Part 2: John Locke

- Have students use a [3-2-1 Prompt](#) to review the information about Locke in their Venn diagram.
 - 3 facts
 - 2 questions
 - 1 idea they liked
- Provide students with Excerpts from John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. Provide time to work on questions with a partner and then facilitate a class discussion of their responses.

Part 3: Jean Jacques Rousseau

- Have students use a [3-2-1 Prompt](#) to review the information about Rousseau in their Venn diagram.
 - 3 facts
 - 2 questions
 - 1 idea they liked
- Provide students with Excerpts from Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. Provide time to work on questions with a partner and then facilitate a class discussion of their responses.

Part 4: Mary Wollstonecraft

- Have students use a [3-2-1 Prompt](#) to review the information about Wollstonecraft in their Venn diagram.
 - 3 facts
 - 2 questions
 - 1 idea they liked
- Provide students with Mary Wollstonecraft and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Provide time to work on questions with a partner and then facilitate a class discussion of their responses.

Post-Assessment

- [Exit Ticket](#): Who would have benefitted from the ideas of the Enlightenment? Who would have opposed the ideas of the Enlightenment?

Extension Activities

[Philosophy Slam](#)

- Pose the question: "Are humans naturally good?"
- Have students create a paragraph or poem in response.
- Writing may be based on personal experiences, observations and reflections, and/or research.

Additional References

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The Oxford Observer Videos

“The Enlightenment: John Locke.” 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZBs78WQuUc>

“The Enlightenment: Moral Revolutions.” 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=33&v=wVWq9zB_3-U&feature=emb_logo

“The Enlightenment: Social Contract.” 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av6R8QfgZ48&feature=emb_logo

Materials and Resources

Agree / Disagree Statements

Check agree or disagree to show your opinion about each statement.

	AGREE	DISAGREE
Humans are naturally selfish.		
Without government, the world would be chaotic.		
Giving up some of your rights in exchange for law and order sounds like a good idea.		
If the people do not agree with the government, then the people have the right to rebel and demand change.		
Education is necessary to become useful and productive.		
The purpose of government is to protect the citizens' rights.		
Some jobs should be filled only by a specific gender.		
People know how best to govern their own affairs, not the government.		
Through experience, people naturally gain wisdom and insight.		
Every person should be given an education.		
All people should be free and equal.		
Humans are naturally good.		

The Enlightenment: 5 W Chart

Work on your own to complete the first column of the chart with everything you know about the Enlightenment. Then work with a small group to add more information to the second column.

	On my own	With my group
When?		
Where?		
Who?		
What?		
Why?		

Enlightenment Backgrounder

In the 1600s and 1700s, most European countries were ruled by kings and queens who had complete control of the government and who claimed that God gave them the right to rule. These absolute monarchs inherited their power from their royal families.

Inspired by the Scientific Revolution when people used observation and reason to challenge the Catholic Church, philosophers started to question whether monarchy was the best form of government. This movement is now known as The Enlightenment.

Enlightenment writers asked questions like:

- *What is the purpose of government?*
- *What is the best way for a government to rule its people?*
- *Are people born with rights? If so, should these rights be protected by a government?"*

Enlightenment writers believed that government should be democratic, in other words, elected by the people. They wrote books that spread their ideas throughout Europe and beyond.

Enlightenment philosophers thought about **natural law**, which are rules discoverable by logic and reason, just like scientific laws and theories. Enlightenment thinkers extended this concept to social interactions and human behavior, thinking that, in a natural state (in the absence of society), people naturally follow a system of ethics that govern how they act.

One of the earliest Enlightenment writers was **John Locke** who thought that people's consciences were naturally predisposed to helping others, and that society (especially monarchies) were what gave rise to all of the evils in the world. Locke wrote that people are born with **natural rights** like those to life, liberty, and property, and that the purpose of a government should be to protect those rights.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, another Enlightenment writer, went one step further saying that people naturally had certain rights and that government should protect those rights (unlike what government had been doing at that time). Rousseau argued that a ruler and the people they rule should enter into a **social contract** that clearly states the laws that the government and the citizens have to follow.

Mary Wollstonecraft was an Enlightenment writer who recognized that most philosophers did not include women in their writing. Wollstonecraft argued that **women** should also be equal in society and under the law.

The Enlightenment inspired many changes in global history. For example, starting in the 1700s and continuing to today, governments write constitutions that list the powers of the government and the rights of the people in sets of laws that are designed to prevent tyranny and corruption. Some monarchs in the 1700s read Enlightenment ideas and changed the way they ruled as a result. In addition, the women's rights movement traces its beginning to the Enlightenment and continues to push for equality for all today.

Excerpts from John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*

If man in the **state of nature** is free, if he is absolute lord of his own person and possessions [things that he owns], why will he give up his freedom? Why will he put himself under the control of any person or **institution** [an organization created for a religious, educational, social, or political purpose]? The obvious answer is that rights in the state of nature are constantly exposed to the attack of others. Since every man is equal and since most men do not concern themselves with **equity** and **justice**, the enjoyment of rights in the state of nature is unsafe and insecure. Hence each man joins in society with others to preserve his **life**, **liberty**, and **property**.

1. What do you think Locke means by “state of nature”?
2. According to John Locke, why would a person “put himself under the control of any person or institution,” like a government?
3. What does Locke mean when he says, “the enjoyment of rights in the state of nature is unsafe and insecure?” Can you think of an example of this?
4. What are the three natural rights that Locke lists at the end of this excerpt? Do you think that these three rights are equally important?

...as far as we have any light from history, we have reason to conclude, that all peaceful beginnings of government have been laid in the **consent** [permission] of the people.

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5. According to Locke, what have “all peaceful beginnings of government” had in common? Why do you think that might lead to a more peaceful government?

*[When] the **legislature** shall . . . grasp [for] themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over their lives, liberties, and estates of the people, . . . they forfeit [give up] the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary [opposite] ends, and it [passes] to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty. . . .*

6. According to Locke, when does a legislature, or government, lose its right to rule?

Excerpts from Rousseau's *The Social Contract*

I...regard the establishment of the political body as a real **contract** between the people and the chiefs chosen by them: a contract by which both parties bind themselves to observe the laws therein expressed, which form the ties of their union.

1. According to this excerpt from *The Social Contract*, what do the people and the government agree to as a part of the contract?

From whatever side we approach our principle [belief], we reach the same conclusion, that the social compact [contract] sets up among the citizens an equality of such a kind, that they all bind themselves to observe the same conditions and should therefore all enjoy the same rights.

2. According to Rousseau, what is one advantage of the social contract?

