

Liberty and the Age of Enlightenment

Lesson #1 of the Pursuit of Liberty Module

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the philosophies of the Enlightenment influence American thought and the Revolutionary War?

OVERVIEW

The Age of Enlightenment spans the late 17th Century and into the early 19th Century, bringing new philosophies about life, individualism, society, and politics into discussion. The era emerged in Europe, but ideas journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean to enlighten the minds of British colonists. Ideals such as natural law, liberty, progress, constitutional government, and separation of church and state became byproducts of the workings of the great minds that lived during the Age of Enlightenment. This range of ideas and values sparked an outpouring of discussion, debate, and publication that set in motion the ideas that lead to revolutions and rebellions and a pursuit of individual and national liberty.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
 - Describe some of Age of Enlightenment philosophies, particularly social contract and liberty.
 - Discuss some of the Enlightenment philosophers in Europe and America.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Examine a primary source and track some of the Enlightenment themes in the document
3. Evaluation
 - Evaluate the meaning of Enlightenment terms and how they were put into discussion and practice.

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the [Lesson's PowerPoint](#) to explore the context and history; the PowerPoint introduces Essential Questions and lays foundational knowledge about the conflict.
2. Distribute the [primary source worksheet](#).
3. Discussing definitions to be written on the worksheet can be done as a class, in small groups, or individually. (Social Contract, Liberty, Individualism, Separation of Power)
4. Let the students select a primary source to read and examine with the worksheet.
 - a. A selection of primary sources is available on the [Lesson Plan Page](#) for this purpose.

5. Have the students complete the primary source worksheet; they can share some of the details that stood out to them with the class.

STANDARDS

Please visit the [Lesson Plan Page](#) and select the “Common Core and NCSS Standards for Social Studies” to view the details.

RESOURCES

[Visit the Lesson Plan Page](#) to find all resources in one convenient place. You’ll find everything mentioned or linked in this Lesson Plan along with additional videos, articles, primary sources, and biographies.

Quick Links

- [PowerPoint](#)
- [Primary Source Summary Worksheet](#)
- [Declaration of Independence In4 \(Video\)](#)

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Option 1: Thomas Paine

Students can use the following resources to learn about Thomas Paine and some of his famous writings that inspired and sustained the American Revolution.

[Thomas Paine](#) (video)

[Thomas Paine](#)

[Common Sense](#) (video)

[Common Sense](#)

[The American Crisis](#)

Next have the students write a letter as though they are corresponding with Thomas Paine, offering compliments, asking questions, or even debating his ideas. (The exchange of letters and written thoughts was a key element of the Enlightenment Era.)

Option 2: Enlightenment Meets Civics!

Ask the students to select several government theories or concepts from the Enlightenment Era. (See list on Slide 4 of the PowerPoint, if you need ideas.) Then, facilitate a class discussion about how these ideas are at work in local, state, and/or national government. Do they work well? If they do not work well, should the idea be replaced and with what new idea? What might be the benefits of continuing with the concept or the benefits of something new?